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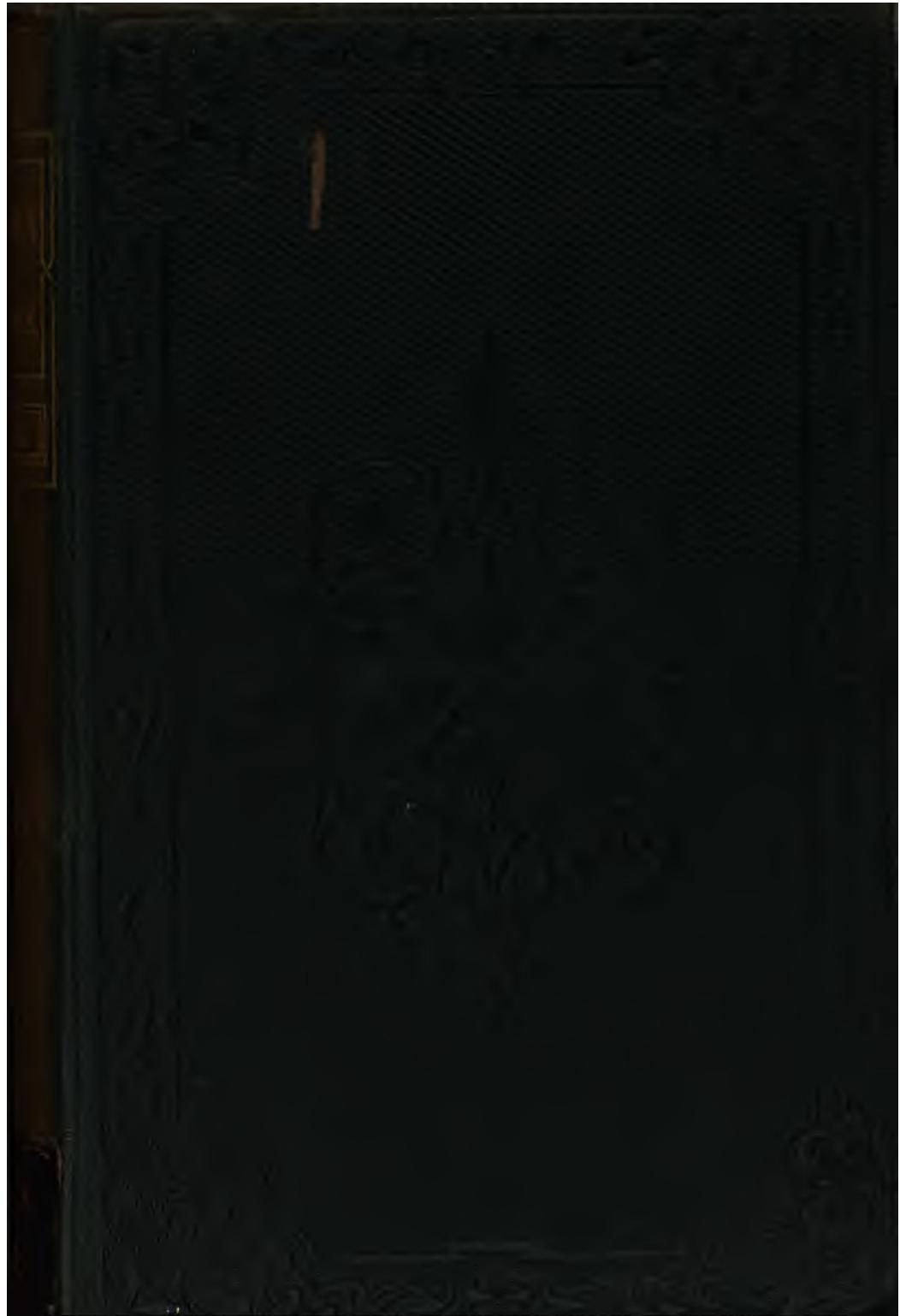
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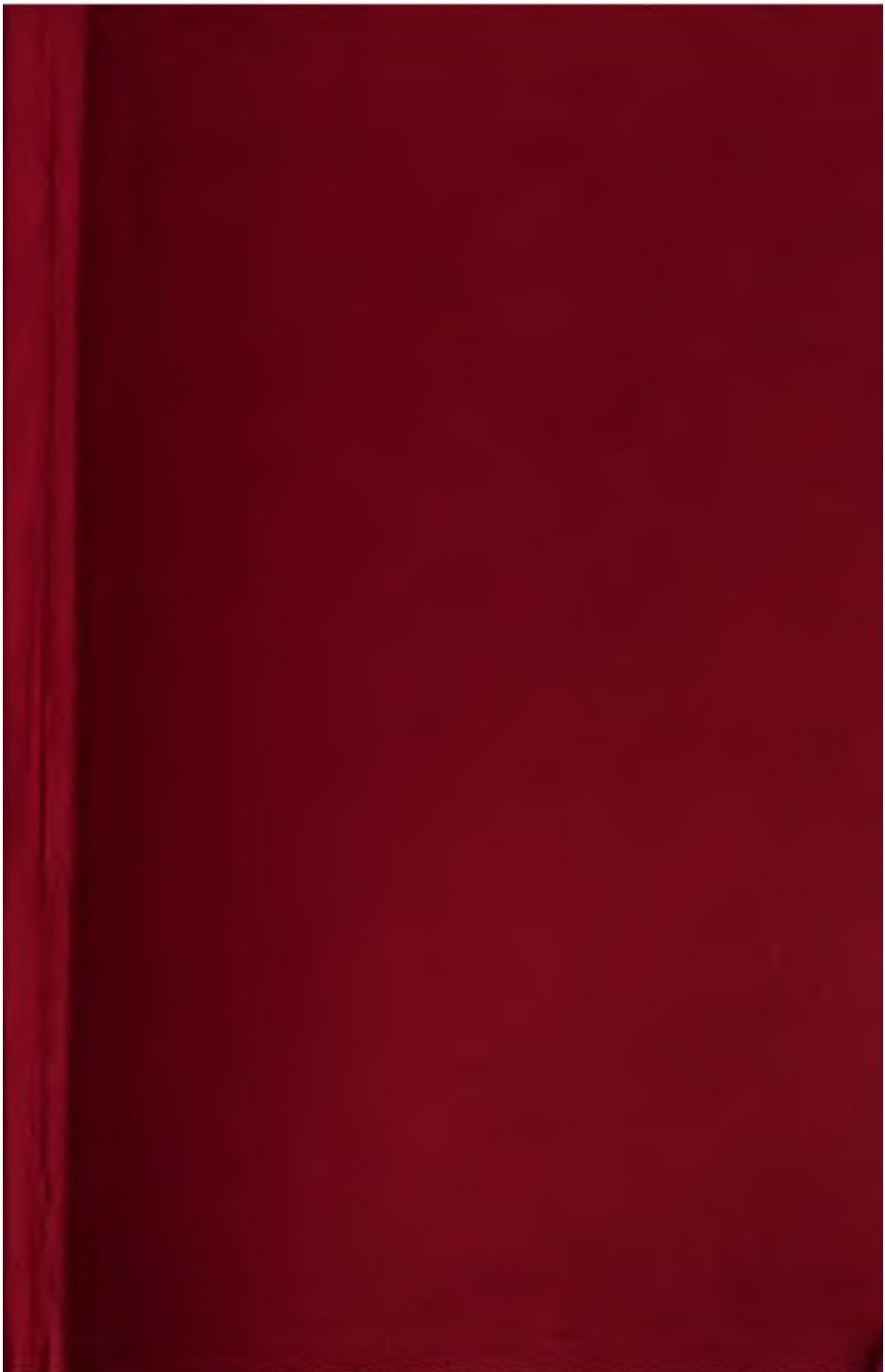






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M A M M O N;

OR,

THE HARSHIPS OF AN HEIRESS.

BY

M R S. G O R E.

Glories, like glowworms, far away, shine bright;
But look'd-to near, have neither heat nor light.
WEBSTER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1855.

249. v. 474.

his son. Legions of flies buzzing in the hermetically-closed windows, enlivened by the louder drone of an occasional wasp, afforded a running accompaniment to their angry dialogue.

The subject of their quarrel was one of no uncommon occurrence between a rich old father and his son and heir ;—namely, an imprudent marriage contemplated by the latter. But, as John Woolston had attained the sober age of thirty-one, and was, in other respects, a sedate and well-conditioned man, it may be inferred that the sole thing wanting in the engagement so unacceptable to his father, was the worldly pelf with which the Woolston family were themselves amply provided. The rent-roll of the Harrals estate amounted to eight thousand per annum ; and the poor quiet little Lady Woolston, who had crept away from the dessert table, on perceiving that a stormy debate was about to set in between her husband and son, sprang from a wealthy Liverpool family, of commercial origin, from whom she derived a considerable fortune.

Sir Harry, however, remained as keenly alive to the value of a guinea, as though it were a coin he had rarely the luck to finger. Having charged his estate, at his marriage, with a sum of five-and-twenty thousand pounds, to be ultimately divided among his younger children, he made it the business of his life to economise, out of his income, the means of paying off this unwelcome incumbrance ; till, by degrees, penurious habits became second nature. And now, though the sum in request had not only been fully completed, but distributed in the form of dowry to his three married daughters, he remained as careful, or rather as shabby, as if his family and his engagements were still unprovided for.

John Woolston, though an only son, and heir-in-tail to so handsome a property, had been educated at Rugby rather than Eton, and at a minor college at Cambridge numbering Woolstons aforegone among its benefactors, solely with a view to tame down his aspirings, and

check his habits of expense. Sir Harry had even compelled him to study for the bar, on pretence that the recordership of his county town, or the chairmanship of the quarter sessions, would in a few years await his acceptance. But the real object of the wary old man was to establish his son out of harm's way, in quiet chambers in the Temple, rather than expose him to the pleasures and perils of a bachelor residence in May Fair.

The result was, that, instead of becoming Jack Woolston and a spendthrift, he remained plain John, and what his fashionable brother-in-law, Gerard Molyneux, termed a snob.

But Sir Harry found no cause to triumph in the results of his policy. For though his son had submitted to his authority so far as to eat his way to the bar, the bar afforded him nothing to eat in return ; and in the event of his accomplishing the match, the announcement of which had so moved the ire of the old baronet, Mr. Woolston possessed nothing towards the

maintenance of a family, save the allowance of five hundred per annum, formally assigned to him on leaving college.

This material point was again and again urged upon him by Sir Harry. But John replied, and at first with tolerable composure, "that, having complied through life with the wishes and counsels of his parents, he must on the present occasion be permitted to consult his own inclinations. Since Sir Harry denied him all further pecuniary assistance, he would rely on his professional exertions, and be content."

"Ay,—till you come into your estate," interrupted Sir Harry. "I know what you mean, sir:—till your father is shuffled under ground, and you are privileged to stand in his shoes ! No doubt these Denny Cross people have taken the exact measure of your rights and titles;—perhaps employed an actuary, to calculate my chances of life!"

"You do them great wrong, sir. Mr. Pennington respects himself, and I trust respects *me*

too much to indulge in any such paltry speculations," replied young Woolston. "For three years past, I have been engaged to his daughter; yet he has never urged my fulfilment of the contract, knowing it to be contrary to your wishes."

"Mighty honourable,—mighty magnanimous! But if so scrupulous, why not forbid you his house?—Why not end the matter at once?"

"Because he knows his daughter to be sincerely attached to me; and judges it unnecessary to oppose our mutual happiness, since we are prepared to be poor, and frugal, till *you*, my dear father, can be brought to contemplate the case in a more reasonable point of view."

"Thank you, sir; thanks, both to you and Mr. Pennington, and the whole legion of his clod-hopping family! If *you* are content, John Woolston, so am I.—But of this be sure:—that I am neither to be schooled nor canted out of my opinion. When you first asked my sanction to your addresses to this precious Maria

of yours,—though even then, you had obtained both her's and her father's consent,—I told you plainly that *never* should such a daughter-in-law cross my threshold. No—never, never, *never!*"

"And I answered, that, as the Penningtons were people of the highest respectability in the county, and as the amiable disposition of my intended wife was a sufficient dowry for a man so unambitious as myself, I saw no grounds, sir, for breaking off the connection."

"Unambitious!" retorted his father; "you may truly say unambitious! To content yourself with the low circle of a petty squire, like Richard Pennington; little above the condition of a yeoman!"

"I beg your pardon, sir. The Penningtons of Denny Cross have held their own in Northamptonshire quite as long as the Woolstons of Harrals. Unsecured by an entail, *their* estates have been morselled out; while ours remain intact. But this does not intitle us to look down upon

an independent man who has brought up a large family most creditably on a property of fifteen hundred a year ; whose sons are rising in the world ; and whose daughters——”

What Sir Harry Woolston permitted himself to say of the daughters, it is unnecessary to repeat. Suffice it that his disparagement put the finishing aggravation to the wrath of his son ; who now firmly announced his intention to make the vilified Maria his wife, without further delay. A small legacy lately bequeathed him by one of his mother's relations, would enable him to form an establishment suitable to their moderate pretensions. And again, he steadily repeated that his allowance would suffice their utmost wishes ; and that Roger Farmer, the eminent Queen's counsel, of whom he had been a favourite pupil, had promised to push him forward in his profession.

Sir Harry, though his face was almost livid from the constraint he was exercising over one of the worst of tempers, determined to make

a last effort to bring better convictions to the mind of his son. Till now, John Woolston had maintained in his family and neighbourhood the character of “an old head on young shoulders.” His prudence, though dormant, might perhaps still be roused.

“To place the whole matter fairly before you, John,” said the old man, lowering his voice to an almost confidential tone, “the fact is, that I have much to reproach myself with, concerning the state in which the Harrals property will fall into your hands. For years after my death, it will be impossible for you to reside here ; unless an advantageous marriage should have supplied you, in the interim, with the means of putting the place into condition. The necessity of paying off your sisters’ fortunes compelled me to neglect the necessary repairs not only of this house, which is in an all but tumble-down condition, but of my farms and out-buildings. Four years’ income would be absorbed in the outlay indispensable to set all this in order.”

But the old head was *too* old for such shallow arguments ; and the shoulders were much too young to resist a shrug of impatience.

“ Depend upon it, sir,” pleaded Mr. Woolston in reply, “ that if there were no Denny Cross in the world, and no Maria Pennington, nothing would induce me to marry for mercenary considerations. As to the terrible prospects you hold out, money for such purposes is easily obtained on mortgage ; and to the consequent curtailment of our income, my wife and I will cheerfully submit.”

This intimation, and the word .“ wife,” with which it was accompanied, raised the exasperation of the irate old gentleman to its climax.

“ Then, by the Lord Almighty,” cried he, after swallowing at a gulp the last half of his bumper of fiery port, “ I trust the crazy old roof of this mansion will fall in and crush you both, as a judgment on your ingratitude and rebellion. And never do I wish to see your face again.”

After which explosion of wrath, and a few expletives very short of decorous on the part of a county magistrate, he started from his chair, and rang the bell for coffee with a degree of violence that brought the venerable butler hobbling into the room, to add, by his rubicund face, another shade of crimson to its glow.

It was no small comfort to the old servant to find Mr. Woolston quietly wiping his mouth with his doiley ere he rose from table, instead of engaged in fisticuffs with the author of his days ; as, from her ladyship's premature retreat, and the loud summons of the bell, he had half expected. But no sooner had Sir Harry, after ordering coffee in the drawing-room, made as precipitate an exit as his gout would admit, than Mr. Woolston desired that his baggage might be dispatched after him to the neighbouring town of Hurdiston ; whither he was about to proceed on foot.

“ I have unexpected business in town, Wardlaw, and must take my chance of a place in the

mail," said he, in answer to the anxiously inquiring looks of the old man. "As the evening is so fine, a walk will be pleasanter than the phaeton."

A minute afterwards, he stepped quietly out into the shrubbery, as if for an evening stroll; and, once released from the irritating atmosphere of the stuffy dining-room, the pleasant summer air soon restored the composure which was his habitual characteristic.

And in becoming himself again, John Woolston was forced to admit that his father's opposition was no stronger than he had anticipated. In all the relations of life, Sir Harry, an obstinate old Tory of the most bigoted order, was harsh, dogged, and impracticable:—so long accustomed to have his own way, that he had become as much attached to it as to his shabby old furniture, his dilapidated family mansion, or any other of his belongings. Useless to hope for any change of domestic legislation when he had once laid down the law; and nothing

remained for his son and his son's Maria, but to make the best of their overclouded prospects.

Under such circumstances, it was no small comfort that the Penningtons were not a touchy generation. Devoid of the over-sensitiveness which selfish people dignify by the name of proper pride, they knew that the heir-apparent of Harrals was intitled, in a worldly point of view, to form a better match than with a daughter of Denny Cross ; and if they did not sympathise with Sir Harry's resentments, wisely forgave them.

But this was the only point on which the discarded son could reflect with comfort, as he sauntered on towards the high road, under the shade of the Portugal laurels. Though no admonitory chime sounded in his ears from the bells of Hurdiston, he was half inclined to "turn again ;" if not to submit himself to his despotic father, at least to take a kindly leave of his mother, of whom he had always been the

favourite child. Years might elapse before he again visited Harrals. He might, perhaps, never set foot there again, till his father was laid in the grave. His heart grew sore at the thought. Already, he repented his precipitation.

On reaching the shrubbery gate, of which he had a pass-key, he turned to take a last look of the grim old mansion, the home of his childhood. And, ugly and dreary as it looked now that the sun was no longer shining on its dingy brick walls and narrow stone-coped windows, (which much resembled those of a Hammersmith boarding-school that had lost its way in the fields), his affections yearned towards the old place from which his own wilfulness had driven him forth into banishment.

At that moment, under the influence of a thousand tender family associations, the cottage in the environs of London to which he had been looking forward as the Eden of which his dear Maria was to be the Eve, appeared

THE HARDSHIPS OF AN HEIRESS. 15

far less of a Paradise than the gloomy barrack
which intitled his family to be styled in the
county and the records of the Landed Gentry,
as the Woolstons of Harrals !——

CHAPTER II.

IN the course of the following month, the County Chronicle duly announced to Sir Harry Woolston, that his son had accomplished his act of rebellion. Among the marriages recorded in its pages, appeared, "John Woolston, Esq., to Maria, daughter of Richard Pennington, Esq., of Denny Cross."—No allusion to Harrals, no mention of his own parentage; and this omission, suggested by motives of delicacy, was resented as an insult.

In after-years, when the matter came to be discussed in the family circle, John Woolston

admitted that he had been wrong, in his whole management of the affair.—Had he dispatched one of his brothers-in-law to negotiate with his father a cessation of hostilities, the old man, on finding the marriage inevitable, would probably have made the best of it. But in this, as in all other affairs of life, John Woolston had acted more scrupulously than wisely. He had persisted in fulfilling his engagements to Maria Pennington, because conscious that he had sought and won her affections. And he forbore to involve the husbands of his sisters in his father's displeasure, because it was clear that something more than the five-and-twenty thousand pounds already decreed to them, must have been saved out of the eight thousand per annum enjoyed for a period of seven-and-thirty years, by a man who scarcely expended three ; and who grudged the outlay of a few pounds on brick and mortar to keep his roof weather-tight over his head. It was expected, in short, that the more than thrifty baronet would die rich ; and John

Woolston felt that the interests of his sisters, and their families, ought not to be compromised.

And thus, a permanent feud was established between the father and son. Even those who disliked Sir Harry Woolston, and they were already numerous, with ample “power to add to their number,” blamed the contumacious John. Filial impiety has few partizans; and without entering into the cause of the quarrel, the neighbours who found Harrals becoming more dreary and inhospitable every year, saw strong grounds for deplored the act which had transferred the matrimonial establishment of its heir-apparent to a weedy villa at Hendon.

The young *ménage*, however, spent its cheerful Christmas at Denny Cross, and its first summer at Hastings; while Harrals proceeded to shut up two sides of its heavy old quadrangle, from which the bricks were gradually disengaging themselves, for want of new pointing; and lay encumbering the flag-stones beneath, like the unripe fruit under a plum-tree.

The three daughters of Sir Harry Woolston—one of whom was married to the second son of a nobleman, one, to the curate of the parish, and one to a man, whose means and origin were as equivocal as his manners and exterior were prepossessing—affected to remain neutral in the family quarrel. But all comfort in their visits to Harrals was destroyed ; and Maple Hill, the retreat of the offending couple, was too small to afford them a welcome by way of compensation. The result was complete estrangement.

For a time, Woolston and his wife were too happy in each other to look beyond the sweet-briar hedge of their villa. Like bees, they lived in winter upon the honey hived during their long summer. And when a little hazel-eyed girl was born to them, whom they ventured to name Janetta, after Lady Woolston, the proud barrister counted up his gains at the close of the circuit, and rejoiced to find that they formed a tolerably satisfactory addition to his narrow income.

For the baronet showed no signs of relenting.

He had perhaps the plea that his son refrained from all demonstration of penitence. Like most inveterate port-bibbers who have passed their allotted three-score years and ten, he was becoming muzzy and morose; dozing through his evenings, and grumbling through his mornings; more especially if anything occurred to disturb the dull routine of his life:—as a stone thrown into a stagnant pond discomposes its scummy surface.

Neither of his three sons-in-law would have ventured to provoke one of these angry outbreaks, by mentioning the name of the banished John; which the constituted authorities of Harrals seemed resolved to dismiss into oblivion.

Gerald Molyneux, the husband of Emma, the eldest daughter, was too fine a gentleman to embark in family squabbles. Harpsden, the curate, who was looking forward to a living at the hands of Sir Harry, when entreated by his gentle Caroline to interfere in her brother's behalf, pleaded the interests of their little boy. As

to Wroughton and Clara, they were living too gay a life on the continent to trouble their heads about the young couple at Hendon, or the old couple at Harrals. And thus, everything went on ; the mortar dropping from the walls, the tiles from the roof ; and from the hearts of the father and son, every trace of mutual attachment.—An unnatural state of things ;—beginning with a fault, and ending almost in crime.

Three years had elapsed since the dispute in the stuffy dining-room, when the little villa at Hendon resounded with the squalls of a second baby. And this time, a son and heir. Yet, such was the obstinacy which John Woolston inherited, if he inherited nothing else, from the dogged old baronet, that he persisted in avoiding all allusion to his family honours, when inscribing for the “Times,” among the births of the day, “the lady of J. Woolston, Esq., of a boy.” And lo ! the advent of a child in whose honour an ox, or at all events a sheep or two, would have been roasted whole, had it seen the light, as in heirship

bound, under the canopy of one of the old-fashioned state beds of Harrals, was commemorated only by a bottle of Cape wine, and a home-made cake, in the meagre establishment at Maple Hill.

For the income of the Woolstons had not increased with their family. The young wife, delicate and indolent, had usually a sister from Denny Cross staying with her, to assist in the nursing and housekeeping; and poor John, a little sick of omnibus transit between Hendon and his chambers, and a little dispirited for want of the club, from which he had made it a point of conscience to withdraw his name and subscription, began to think it might have been wiser if, in the onset, conciliatory measures had restored him to the comfort and decencies of Harrals. But, as people usually say on such occasions, “it was too late *now*.” The pettish spirit of independence which had so little availed him, must, for the sake of consistency, be persevered in.

No one was at hand to remonstrate. The Molyneuxes were engrossed by their aristocratic connections and enjoyments ; the Wroughtons were still on the continent ; the Harpsdens absorbed in parsonage cares. As to Mrs. Woolston's humbler family and friends, they were satisfied to have their dear Maria and her children back among them at Denny Cross, to enjoy Christmas cheer, and probably Midsummer recreation, without inquiring too curiously how the interim was passed.

Had John Woolston entertained the smallest solicitude concerning the ultimate welfare of his children, he would probably have taken steps for their restoration to the position they had innocently forfeited. But the little cherub in the cockaded cap had only now to grow and prosper, and ultimately succeed to the honours of a baronetcy, and eight thousand a year ; in the comfortable conviction of which, John Woolston stepped daily into the bus which conveyed him to Temple Bar ; indifferent to the minor miseries

of unvarnished boots and an ill-brushed hat ; and far more deeply interested in in-coming fees, than in the resentments and dilapidations of Harrals.

CHAPTER III.

ON the day of little Johnny's christening, however, the discarded son became conscious, almost for the first time, that he was decidedly in the wrong.

From the moment of welcoming the little fellow to his modest wicker cradle, he regarded him less as the second child of his happy wedlock, than as the heir-in-tail to the family estates ; and the sort of consequence he assigned to his infant, seemed to retrace itself through his own veins to those of his father. However lightly he had hitherto affected to hold the he-

reditary rank and fortune of the Woolstons, now that he had subsided into a mere link in the chain that was to unite their name with posterity, he began to exaggerate its importance.

This son of his, who squalled so lustily when invested in the christening-robe worked by his Denny Cross aunts, and already worn by his sister on occasion of a similar solemnity, might perhaps live to aggrandise the family hereditaments. Little Johnny need not marry imprudently. Little Johnny need not extinguish himself on the threshold of life. Nay, he might perhaps live to become a peer of the realm, and increase the Harrals estate by the Walsingham property adjoining ; long coveted by the reigning baronet, who had waited and parleyed for thirty years, in hopes to get it a bargain.

Yet, in spite of all these prospective honours, and lacking the ox roasted whole for immediate distribution, and the stout October that ought to have been brewed, with a view to his coming of age, the world in general cared as little for

the birth of John Woolston the Second, as for that of the last-born pauper in the parish union. Even the heart of his proud father was darkened on the morning of the christening, by a letter from his coal-merchant, requesting that the amount of his over-due Christmas bill might be settled without further delay.

But it was not alone the peremptory tone of the dealer in Screened Walls-end, or even the careless one in which the baptismal ceremony was gabbled over by an over-tasked curate, that produced his humiliation of spirit. His brother-in-law, Harpsden, formerly, when the suitor of Caroline Woolston, so obsequious and affectionate, had evaded, by shuffling excuses, a journey to town to officiate at his nephew's christening; while Mrs. Molyneux acquainted her brother, in a few reckless lines, that Gerald and herself found it impossible to quit Molyneux Castle before the close of the hunting season, to stand sponsors for the boy. As to Wroughton and Clara, they had not so much as trou-

bled themselves to answer the letter announcing the birth of an heir to Harrals.

Poor Woolston ceased therefore to wonder, since his own kith and kin stood aloof, that his mere acquaintances were growing cooler and cooler. Ignorant of the nature of the Harrals entail, people concluded, from appearances, that the offended son was actually disinherited ; and the nods of the great, whom he accidentally encountered, became more and more patronising ; and the coldness of the ungracious, more icy.

Already sore from the consciousness of a pinched and needy household, these slights galled him severely. He had not greatness of soul to rise superior to such petty annoyances. Few people have, to whom it is impossible to pay their coal-merchant's bill. Nor did he take into account that it was less the poor man who was avoided by his acquaintance, than the care-worn. To be seen walking with an individual in a seedy coat, is not half so unsatisfactory to a man of the world, as to waste his time on a

companion half-a-year behind the events of the day ; to whom everything, from heavy politics to trifling gossip, must be unfolded and explained ; and who, for want of animal spirits, is as flat as a glass of stale soda-water. For a mere acquaintance, accepted only for purposes of mutual entertainment, has no right to be a bore ; and if a bore, is dealt with accordingly.

There were moments, indeed, when Woolston, smarting under neglect and privation, felt inclined to forestal the future affluence awaiting him, by a post-obit levy ; of sufficient amount, to convince the world that eventual prosperity would enable him to repay its courtesies, or return it scorn for scorn. But prudence prevailed. He had always promised himself to succeed to an estate unencumbered by any act of profligacy or prodigality : and he would not secede from his principle. He would go bearing on. Maria must content herself to turn the old silk gown so long her Sunday best. He was almost proud of his own seedy coat. As to the

coal-merchant's bill, it should be paid by instalments.

Another year, however, found him less hearty, and far less philosophical. Though his income was punctually paid by his father's banker, it was unaccompanied by a word of comment, or overture of kindness ; and Sir Harry, like a stag-horned tree, seemed deeper rooted by every additional year. It appeared to invigorate the constitution of the vindictive old man, to know that by the prolongation of his days, he could still punish his son. The grim face of poverty, meanwhile, was acquiring new features at Maple Hill. The little boy proved an ailing child. The air of the weedy villa did not agree with him ; and a suburban apothecary, unable to fortify, per force of pharmacopœia, the little fellow's infirm constitution, suggested sea-bathing as indispensable.

Ten weeks at Brighton added something considerable to the quarter's expenses. But they also produced something so nearly resembling

bloom on the pale cheeks of the sickly child, that, early in the following spring, the prescription was renewed. And as the scanty professional engagements of John Woolston, "promising more hereafter," rendered it hazardous for him to absent himself from town, his wife was forced to submit to a temporary separation.

It was one of those cold, rainy, backward springs, which suggest a wish that winter would retain its own rough name, in order that one might be on one's guard against its harshness. After a few severe colds, produced by trudging homewards in the mud because no place was to be had in the omnibus, poor Woolston, as much out of sorts with the elements as King Lear, placed a placard of "To be Let Furnished" on the top of his garden wall, and a terse advertisement to the same effect in the "Supplement to the Times :" and proceeded to establish himself in his chambers in the Temple, till the return of his family.

But unluckily, the place proved as little at-

tractive to the public as to its master, and hung heavy on his hands. Nothing seemed to go well with him. Domestic care rendered him listless in his profession. Few people like to entrust their business to a man who seems incapable of managing his own. If it be true that “nothing succeeds like success,” nothing is so unsuccessful as mischance.

One day, in passing Hoare’s banking-house, as he was sauntering along the Strand, he was run against by a spruce, well-dressed man, rushing across the pavement to an equally well-varnished cab; who, on pausing to apologize, proved to be his brother-in-law, Gerald Molyneux.

An affectation of surprise and a few civil inquiries after Mrs. Woolston and the children, were indispensable; though the Honourable Gerald had evidently little inclination to be seen talking to a man who owed so little to his tailor —except his bill.

And when they had shaken hands, and shaken each other off, while John Woolston proceeded

moodily to his Temple dinner, the fashionable husband of his sister Emma was shrugging his shoulders at the quizzicality of the distressed family man.

"By the time old Woolston drops, of which he seems to have no thoughts at present," mused he, as he drove back to his bright little Belgravian home, "John will have become an irretrievable snob. All's up with poor John ! That wretched match has crushed him, root and branch. And I'm *really* sorry for it. The October shooting at Harrals is far from despicable. And if John had turned out what he ought, and modernised the system of the house, a month or so in the year, there, might have been a pleasant resource to us."

It did not occur to him, meanwhile, that a cheerful dinner might be acceptable to the brother-in-law who had informed him that his family was at Ramsgate. Even if it had, he would have been puzzled to supply it; for he lived a life of surface, not unusual with Honourable

younger brothers, labouring under domestic felicity : dining out three or four days in the week ; while on the off-days, the husband fared sumptuously at his club, and the wife contented herself with a solitary chicken.

The split between John Woolston and his fellow-creatures, meanwhile, was becoming wider and wider. The influence of a contracted purse infected his whole nature, and he was growing narrow-minded and morose. The character of his wife remained undeteriorated, for, a stranger to luxury, a little discomfort was amply compensated by her happiness as a wife and mother ; and anxiety for her sick boy excluded all meaner cares. To accompany her children in their daily stroll on the sands, and indite to their father a bulletin of their health, was recreation enough for Maria ; and that her bonnet was shabby, or her mutton chop tough and smoky, passed unobserved.

But it was not so with her husband. *He* missed his cheerful club—his stall at the opera

— his Epsom and Ascot — prime sherry and fruity claret ; and was already beginning to fancy this work-a-day world a far less pleasant place than of yore.

There was but one of its inhabitants, however, to whom he felt disposed to confide his disappointment, the far-famed Roger Farmer, of whom he had been the favourite pupil ; a man who, having amassed in his profession a noble fortune, had exhibited the rare disinterestedness of declining one of the highest and most lucrative honours of the law.

But at the period of his marriage, Farmer, himself the type of celibacy, had assumed the privilege conveyed by nearly a score of years' seniority, to assure him, in the plainest English, that the best of marriages was a risk ; and one of doubtful advantage, an act of insanity. So far from accepting scruples of conscience as a justification of his folly, the old bachelor pleaded as earnestly as if he had been defending a case of breach of promise of marriage, that to honour

his father and his mother was a far more stringent duty than to sacrifice his prospects in life to a country miss ; in atonement for having whispered in a ball-room sweet nonsense, to which she was nothing loth to listen.

These counsels, often repeated, and every time with less and less of the foreign aid of ornament, had at length provoked the wilful young lover into sarcastic retorts. And thus, the friendship between him and the man of whose understanding he thought most highly in the world, had cooled into estrangement ; and now that the crisis of repentance predicted by the cynic had actually arrived, how was he to find courage for seeking his old friend, to acknowledge that the bloom had fallen from the roses of his Eden, and that he found himself encompassed by a hedge of thorns ?—

Yet Farmer, bitter as he sometimes was, would have afforded him the kindest as well as the best of counsel. Though firm enough to use the scalpel fearlessly, when occasion needed,

no hand could deal more gently the healing unguent. He liked John Woolston as much as he was capable of liking anything not bound in vellum or printed by Elzevir ; and it would have afforded him real pleasure to find his former pupil seated once more by his fireside.

To the end of time, however, would Woolston, instigated by false pride and self-love, have kept aloof, but that, among the few briefs entrusted to him, there chanced to be one arising out of an anterior suit, in which Farmer had been concerned as senior counsel. And though the wealthy lawyer, content with the fine fortune he had amassed, declined all further business, his advice appeared of such moment to Woolston, to whom the trial was likely to afford a touchstone of professional credit, that he ventured to dispatch a letter to the oracle ; to " Dear Farmer " him, as in their days of former friendship ; and demand his opinion as frankly as he would have sought a sunbeam from the sun.

Within half-an-hour, the gaunt figure of Roger Farmer, not a whit or an hour the worse for the four intervening years, was deposited in Woolston's thread-bare arm-chair; entering into the details of the impending cause with a searching acuteness of intellect which imparted instantaneous light to all that was previously obscure. After diving into the vast ocean of his memory, the man learned in the law brought up the pearl. No one who listened to Farmer's perspicuous interpretation could dream of an appeal.

While business was discussed between them, not so much as the wink of an eyelash did the elder lawyer vouchsafe to any extraneous object. The dusty, disorderly room, so little in accordance with his pupil's former habits, was non-existent to him. He saw nothing of the scattered papers, the mouldy inkstand, the cindery grate, the broken blind, or the ragged hearth rug. But when the last word was said and the last note taken, *in re Rothley versus Barnstable*,

he suddenly observed, “ Your father, I am sorry to find, has not come round, Woolston ?—Where are your wife and children ?—You have never brought them to see me.”—

In a moment, the stream gushed from the rock. Unasked, John Woolston proceeded to repeat all his grievances ; and poor Farmer, after buttoning up his coat, sat and listened, as resignedly as though the fire were not out and the afternoon more than chilly.

“ The old story, the old story !” muttered he, when the plaintiff had said his say, at least, twice over. “ After giving the utmost offence, where you owed implicit obedience, you have made no overtures for reconciliation. I don’t wonder to find you on such bad terms with yourself, after such a succession of blunders. But come and dine with me, to-day, John ; and let us talk over old times, and try to patch up the future. I should like to be able to send good news of you to a kinsman of yours, with whom I made acquaintance, last autumn, at

Liverpool, (while treating with him for the purchase of some Cheshire farms); — the quaintest old fellow I ever met;—but worth his weight in diamond dust.”

“ One of the Wraysburys, of course. My mother was a Liverpool woman;—indebted to a counting-house for her fifty thousand pounds.”

“ A fact which both her ladyship and your father appear to have forgotten. My queer acquaintance, old Adam Wraysbury, informed me that, from the day of his marriage, Sir Harry had sent his wife’s family to Coventry; and that Harrals might lie in Mesopotamia, for anything he knew or cared.”

“ But how came he to mention us at all, to a perfect stranger?”

“ Because, in the room where we were examining our title-deeds, there hung, among a tolerable collection of pictures, the portrait of a youth, by Kneller, bearing so singular a resemblance to yourself, that I was forced to apologise to the old gentleman for the interest it excited,

by informing him that, but for the date and dress, I should conceive it to be the likeness of one of my pupils; who, had he not been the only son of a wealthy Northamptonshire baronet, would probably have risen to the bench.

"‘Not John Woolston, surely?’ cried my host. And on my answering in the affirmative, ‘Natural enough,’ was his reply;—‘the portrait is that of his great grandfather.’—”

Deeply gratified by Farmer’s careless compliment, which afforded him the only thrill of pleasure he had experienced for months, Woolston hesitated to pursue his inquiries.

But the quick eye of the old lawyer had already detected not only his momentary emotion, but his profound depression.

“Come and dine with me to-day, and I will tell you some remarkable traits of this quaint kinsman of yours,” said he. “No, not at Lincoln’s Inn,” he added, in reply to Woolston’s inquiring look; “at my new chambers, in the Albany. Old Margaret, whom you used to

call Mrs. Dalgairns, migrated with me when I abjured the law and its domains ; and is as good a hand as ever at pepper-pot. The old Léoville, too, is none the worse for its transit. Half-past six, therefore ; and as long an evening as your business engagements will admit."

Woolston's engagements, alas ! admitted of a *very* long evening : and on his return from the retired lawyer's cheerful apartments, to his own fusty, sordid, ill-conditioned chamber, he could not recollect that a word had passed touching the originalities of old Adam Wraysbury. But, in addition to some excellent claret, he had imbibed a vein of equally genuine philosophy. Old Farmer was one of those who, regarding this world as a place where much work is to be done, but where enjoyments physical and moral abound in proportion,—a field which it depends upon ourselves to clear of brambles and plant with fruit and flowers,—scouted the idea of despondency. He denounced it as the cowardice

of a diseased mind. To *him*, a hypped man was a fit inmate for a hospital ; and he endeavoured to cheer his young friend into nobler thoughts and better feelings.

“ You contemplate your duties and destinies as confined to too low a sphere, my dear Woolston,” argued he. “ A very short distance before you, lie prospects equally permanent and brilliant, for which half the men in the kingdom would be thankful. Your birthright, both of intellect and fortune, secures you eminence. Meanwhile, if you be not too proud to accept the offer, my house and purse are open to you. Nay, if you *be* too proud, as that sudden flush upon your cheek leads me to fear, you shall pay me interest for my money, sir ; a fraction more, too, than I can obtain from public securities, and thus confer an obligation, instead of receiving one.”

Warm thanks were all that old Farmer received in return for his offer. It was not in the nature of Woolston to accept the aid of a friend as generously as it was offered. All he pro-

mised was, that, in any extremity, he would apply to Farmer rather than to another person.

“ You had best, I can tell you,” rejoined the old lawyer, shaking his hand cordially at parting, “ or, by Jupiter ! I will write a begging-letter in your name to old Adam Wraysbury, and humble your false pride in the dust.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE elation derived by the solitary barrister from this renewal of friendship with a man he esteemed so highly, was of short continuance. To the utter injury of his professional duties, he was shortly afterwards summoned to Ramsgate. The united fortitude of Mrs. Woolston and her sister was not equal to a domestic calamity, to which the sickliness of the little boy assigned peculiar importance. Both children were dangerously ill of scarlet fever ; and Sophia feared that their mother also was sickening.

Poor Woolston started directly ; and in the

course of what was then a long journey, deeply regretted that he had not profited by Farmer's liberal offers of pecuniary aid. He would gladly have procured London advice for those darling children. The report of their condition made by the Ramsgate doctor was alarming, and malignant scarlet fever was just then fatally prevalent. His conscience felt rebuked for having assigned undue importance to money-cares that could only endure for a day : whereas the loss of either of the three so dear to him, would be a calamity indeed. He had not, till that moment, understood the force of his family affections. But the mists arising out of business-life and worldly interests, cleared off in a moment. At the thought of their danger, Harrals and the Court of Chancery became non-existent. The earth seemed to contain only three human forms —three loving human beings bearing his name.

It was, dusk when he reached Ramsgate ;—dusk even in spite of that clearer atmosphere affording, by comparison with his murky court

in the Temple, a second day. But in his heart, was the shadow of night. When he proposed to walk to his lodgings from the inn where the coach stopped, on pretence of stretching his limbs, but in reality to delay his knowledge of the worst, the very ostler perceived him to be so incapable of the effort, that he placed the “gentleman and his baggage,” almost peremptorily, in a fly; and dispatched them to their address.

John Woolston’s presentiments had not deceived him.—The boy was dead!—But the mother and her little daughter were in the utmost danger; which deadened or suspended the effect of the sad event. Dear Maria—the loving wife—the tender mother—parched with fever, gasping for breath, unconscious of all that was passing around her, had a stronger claim upon his tears than the little marble figure extended white and motionless on the mattress of its cot.

After the manner of his sex, John Woolston’s first impulse on recovering his self-possession,

was to find fault. Poor Sophy Pennington, half stupefied by sorrow and terror, was severely called to account for not having sooner summoned him from town ; though, till the eruption made its appearance the preceding night, neither of the medical men in attendance had surmised the fearful nature of the sore throat, of which the two children had been complaining. But, —also after the manner of his sex,—he gave up all for lost, even now that the doctors, aware of the character of the malady, were better able to oppose their skill to its ravages. Even when, the following afternoon, they asserted that Mrs. Woolston's fever was abating, and the bad symptoms of little Netta diminished, he remained hopelessly convinced that a single grave was about to engulf all that was dear to him on earth.

Poor soft-hearted, and not very hard-headed, Sophy Pennington, was wiser. Though, when informed that her sister was on the road to recovery, she gave free vent to the tears, which, at the worst, she had been incapable of shed-

ding, she was comforted. A few hours' rest fortified her for her labours to come ; the task of nursing a fractious child, and breaking to the poor mother the fact that one of her treasures was lost to her for ever.

Neither the temper nor the understanding of John Woolston was brightened by adversity. His troubled mind, like water ruffled by a storm, gave back distorted reflections. As he escorted the little grey coffin of his boy to the cemetery of a Kentish bathing-place, he felt that it was not *there* the destined representative of the Woolstons of Harrals ought to repose ; ascribing to the vindictive character of his father, a circumstance for which he was himself chiefly responsible.

To none of his family, meanwhile, did he think proper to notify the loss he had sustained. They had evinced no interest in the living child. Why molest them by acquainting them that it was at rest ? While seated by his poor wife's bedside, watching her convalescence, he scarcely

deserved the blessing ; so bitterly unchristian were his feelings of resentment.

When the invalid was well enough to be removed to the sofa,—a day how eventful in the annals of the sick room,—and it became necessary to modify the joy with which poor Maria hailed this epoch of her recovery, by affording some explanation of the saddened faces of her husband and sister, Sophia had judiciously prepared for the disclosure, by placing the little girl, now nearly restored to health, by her mother's side. And so justly had she calculated, that, after the first natural burst of maternal grief, the bereaved mother did not refuse to be comforted.

“ God has taken from us the one least fitted to contend with the struggles of life,” said she, in a voice still faint and feeble. “ So long as this darling is left to us, dear husband, let us resign ourselves without a murmur, lest the wrath of the Almighty again overtake us.”

The afflicted and disappointed father endeav-

voured to comply ; and if he still murmured, it was solely against the cold-heartedness of his unaffectionate family. In that chamber, where the only sounds which had as yet been sanctioned by the authorities, were the singing of the kettle or the ticking of the watch, it was impossible to silence his hoarse declarations, that, when in the enjoyment of his property, not one of his kith or kin should ever cross his threshold.

“ I have received twice as much kindness, Sophy, from you and your family, in the course of the last four years,” muttered he to his sister-in-law, “ as from those in whose veins my blood is flowing.”

When the moment arrived for change of air to be desirable, Denny Cross was not backward in renewing its good offices. No other house, perhaps, would have opened its gates to welcome the infected family ; and as the weedy villa was let till the autumn, right thankful was Woolston when the letter of Richard Pennington arrived,

bidding him bring down his wife and child to spend the summer at what he kindly called their “home.”

“If your professional duties call you to town, my dear John,” wrote the warm-hearted squire, “trust me to take good care of my daughter and grand-daughter, during your absence.”

And what a comfort to the poor, wasted, and faint-hearted wife, in her bombazine and broad hems, to be welcomed to the plain, unceremonious abode, where peace and plenty prevailed. How she wondered that, when abiding there in her girlhood, she had ever sighed after Harrals !

Even the depressed Woolston felt cheered when he saw his wife and child surrounded by those who loved them ; the two kind sisters who were never weary of listening to details of poor little Johnny’s last moments and earliest ailments. How little he heeded the homely corduroys and lanky locks of the man out of livery, whom none of them had ever dreamed of calling butler !— How little did he care that the old squire per-

sisted in spelling disappointment with a couple of ss and a single p!—

He had some difficulty indeed in tearing himself away from the scene of his boyish courtship, and present consolation. But it was necessary he should return to town. Though he had remitted his business, ad interim, to the care of an eminent brother barrister, yet, having held no communication with even his clerk since his domestic bereavement, or even furnished him with his change of address, it was indispensable that he should make his appearance at chambers.

On his arrival, he found, of course, like all people who have been long absent from home, a pile of unsatisfactory letters. Though the solicitors with whom he was in communication, had been, according to his desire, referred to Mr. Armit, innumerable were the missives on his table, indited with the clerkly flourish of capitals, peculiar to the shop-keeper's desk. These he flung aside, to be examined at leisure. But

among them were two, addressed in the same hand-writing ; written on black-edged paper, and sealed with a mourning seal smelling of solder, and exhibiting such antiquated dimensions as to attract his notice. Nothing of the London tradesman about *them* :—nothing of the advertising speculator, touting for custom.—The epistles were as provincial in their cut, as though folded and addressed in the town-hall of some country borough.

With a heavy sigh, he threw himself into a chair and deliberately unfolded, *not* an envelope, but a quarto sheet of blue wire-wove ; such as, under the tyranny of his first preparatory school, he had been compelled to overscrawl half-yearly, with what was called a holiday-letter to his parents ; and lo ! the first lines that met his eye, contained words of reprobation.—

“ Messrs. Wortham and Stock, of Liverpool, being greatly surprised at receiving no answer to their letter of the 21st ult., trusted that Mr. Woolston would either honour them with imme-

diate instructions, or place them in communication with his man of business."

Evidently a dun! Yet he owed no man anything in Liverpool. What could it mean? Poor John sighed a still deeper sigh while proceeding to open the letter alluded to of "the 21st ult." which ought to have come first to hand; the contents of which actually stunned him with amazement.

From the epoch of his marriage, never had he been addressed in terms so deferential. But surely it could not be the emotion arising from such empty homage that caused his colour to vary so strangely and his hand to tremble, as he perused the voluminous epistle? Nay, that, long before he reached the concluding signature and customary assurance of obedience and humility on the part of the writer, obliged him to lean back in his chair, to acquire breath and courage for the issue?—For the demand made upon him was neither for pounds, shillings, nor pence; but simply for early instructions concerning his ad-

ministration to the will of the late Adam Wraysbury, gentleman (a word seldom used except to indicate questionable gentility), to which he was appointed sole executor. "The probate duty," the family solicitor thought it necessary to assure him, "would amount to a sum of between eighty and ninety thousand pounds, the mode of raising which, would require his immediate consideration."

On reaching this clause of the letter, John Woolston, with a peevish shrug of the shoulders, was about to throw it aside. The very quotation of such a sum seemed an insult to a man under the necessity of shirking his coal-merchant's bill; for that he could be answerable for Adam Wraysbury's estate otherwise than as executor, did not even occur to him. The old gentleman had probably bequeathed a considerable portion of his property to his niece, Lady Woolston; and selected her son, rather than her husband, whom he detested, to see it equitably administered.

But considering how deeply his feelings were moved as he proceeded, it proved highly judicious, on the part of the formal Liverpool solicitors, to have taken so much time and prose to place him in possession of the fact that he was appointed residuary legatee, as well as executor, and that the sole legacies interfering with his remaindership, consisted of a few thousand pounds to charitable institutions, and one thousand to each of his nephews and nieces, for the purchase of mourning rings, as a memorial of A. W., gent.

As if any one of them were likely to forget an uncle who, having a million and a half to dispose of, had passed them over individually and collectively, to heap the mass of his fortune on the head of the contemned John!—

The whole amount producing, as at present invested, an income of sixty-seven thousand and a fraction per annum, was bound up by a strict entail to descend to the second son of John Woolston's marriage with the daughter of

Richard Pennington, of Denny Cross ; or, lacking a second son, to their eldest daughter, so as to secure it against commixture with the property of the surly baronet, by whom old Adam considered himself slighted and aggrieved.

It required more than one or even two perusals of so wonder-striking a document, to enable the startled man to master and realise its contents. But when he had fully satisfied himself that he was the dupe of no illusion, that the letter was clearly authentic, and that he was actually in possession of a million and a half of money, he exhibited, alas ! neither the equanimity of a philosopher, nor the thankfulness of a Christian.—Had his wife and child been at hand to be pressed to his bosom, his heart might have expanded. As it was, having only within reach a fidgety clerk in the adjoining office, and a dirty old woman in the kitchen, he might be excused for the caution with which he carefully locked up the letter in his desk, and kept silence, yea, even from good words.

Within half an hour, he was on his road to Liverpool ; having indited a few hasty lines to Denny Cross, stating that unexpected business called him from town. The fidgety clerk, to whom he did not vouchsafe even this information, began to fear, indeed, that his employer's wits must be failing him. For Mr. Woolston had silenced all his appeals for instruction concerning his business during his absence, by sending them headlong to the spot with which his learned profession is said to be only too intimately familiar.

CHAPTER V.

As extremes meet, the effects of a sudden stroke of good fortune often resemble those of a sudden stroke of evil. John Woolston was all but stupefied by the startling transition of his destinies from iron to gold. Though it was Midsummer,—plenteous, beauteous Midsummer,—he never once remarked, in his transit from the banks of the Thames to those of the Mersey, so much as that the earth was green, or that the skies were blue.

The journey, though even then curtailed by railway acceleration, was of eight hours' con-

tinuance. Yet it scarcely sufficed for the mental arithmetic of the practical John. His professional experience supplied him with a thousand minor uneasinesses. These old-fashioned country attorneys, who addressed him with such obsequious civility and seemed at present to be sole custodians of his untold treasures, were probably harpies of the first magnitude. He must keep a sharp watch over their proceedings, and assume the reins of government with an unswerving hand ; or to what spoliation might he not be exposed by his utter ignorance of the nature and amount of his uncle's property ! Already he began to wonder whether it consisted chiefly in land, or had been invested in government securities, or private speculations. He had heard, vaguely and with indifference, nay, perhaps with some degree of the contempt for commercial pursuits inherent in the blood of all the Woolstons, that the Wraysburys were largely connected with houses in New York and New Orleans. But, as far as was in his power, he would realise and

consolidate the estate. The vicissitudes of mercantile life were not suited to his taste.

Already, a cubit was added to his stature.
The golden leaven was fermenting in his veins.
—Mammon had marked him for his own!—

The only feeling likely to neutralise these mercenary influences, arose from anticipating the benefits secured by his accession of fortune to his patient wife and promising little girl; to say nothing of the hearty joy about to animate the honest family at Denny Cross.

But alas! no sooner did his thoughts revert from them and their homely happiness, to Harrals and its animosities, than his heart hardened again. The vindictive old man who had screwed him down in durance,—the inert mother, who had raised neither voice nor hand to resist the tyranny by which her eldest-born had been exiled from his place at their fireside, and *his* eldest-born from his place in the family vault,—and whose envious feelings were about to

receive a death-blow in the announcement of the preference accorded him by his opulent kinsman,—were never, *never* to be forgiven.

As to his sisters and their husbands, so long as they breathed, never would he overlook their neglect of his unpretending wife and suffering boy ! Not so much as a particle—not so much as a single bright reflection of his heaps of coin, —should lighten their comparative darkness.

Already, as we said before, the golden leprosy was beginning to corrode the nature of John Woolston.

Nor were these narrow sentiments likely to be ennobled by contact with the cringing attorneys, who, after submitting for thirty years to the bearish despotism of old Wraysbury, were prepared to accept from the hands of his representative any amount of contumely. Habituated to the most vulgar species of insolence—that of purse-pride—Wortham and Stock were too much surprised to find John Woolston commonly courteous, to notice that he was

guarded and distrustful. When they offered their smirking congratulations on so vast an accession of wealth, he answered never a word. When they offered their whimpering condolences on the loss of his much-respected relative, he was equally silent. And, while he despised their hypocrisy, and mistrusted their servility, they probably decided within themselves that the rising young barrister, whose phrases had a marketable value, had already acquired a habit of economising his words.

They *did*, however, begin to suspect that he was not without his share in the oddities of Wraysbury nature, when, in the midst of their explanation of the steps they had been forced to take in consequence of his inexplicable inattention to their letters, they saw him snatch a candle from the table, and hold it high aloft for the better contemplation of an old-fashioned family picture, which they had passed over unregarded, as long as they could remember; but which the newly-inheriting heir was already

examining with the interest due to the key-stone of his fortunes.

It afforded him no small comfort that his benefactor had been laid in the grave previous to his arrival. Mr. Wraysbury's will having contained explicit instructions as to the spot and manner of his interment, which he desired should take place within four days of his decease, his solicitors had complied with his injunctions. John Woolston was consequently relieved from that painful sense of the presence of death, which rebukes all worldly solicitudes ; and there was nothing to obstruct his scrutiny of the strange, unsightly old premises, the dirt and discomfort of which were so unaccountably at variance with the overflowing riches of the man for whom parsimony appeared to have constituted a luxury in itself.

While Messieurs Wortham and Stock were negotiating with the banking firm in which Adam Wraysbury had been for years a sleeping partner, the tens of thousands indispensable to

enable his heir to appropriate to himself his hundreds of thousands, Woolston gave his whole attention to the papers and personality of the deceased.

It was clear that, till within a few years of his end, Adam Wraysbury had contemplated matrimony ; or, at all events, a settlement in life accordant with his splendid income. With house-agents and land-agents, he had commenced a series of treaties for a more suitable residence ; usually breaking off at the last moment negotiations which regarded the investment of some enormous sum, on a quibble or dispute for a few hundreds. In the midst of his household discomfort, too, the old man had amassed materials for a mode of existence almost epicurean. A princely service of plate lay tarnished in his cellars. Warrants for bonded hogsheads of the most costly wines, lay dusty in his bureau. Webs of Gobelin tapestry, and Aubusson carpets were piled, moth-eaten and mouldy, in his lumber-rooms ; and articles of fur-

niture of the most luxurious nature were scattered about in dim and mildewed attics, waiting a more appropriate domicile. Here and there, some fine statue, neglected and forgotten on its pedestal, had been appropriated by low-conditioned servants as a clothes-horse, or drying post ; while pictures which had cost thousands to the penurious old man, who grudged not the purchase, because, aware that he could at any moment sell them again at a high premium, he regarded them simply as an investment, were turned with their faces to the wall, to secure them from dust in an atmosphere that corroded the very canvas. And now, the master's eye, which had never revelled in their beauties, was closed for ever ; and John Woolston, as he gazed on the mouldy and rat-gnawn frames, felt for the first time sensitively alive to the Scriptural injunction against laying up treasures that moth and rust do corrupt.

But the closer his insight into the magnitude of his inheritance, the greater his wonder that

his father so money-loving as to have banished his only son for an improvident marriage, should have neglected the fountain-head of such a Pactolus. Adam Wraysbury's constant announcement of matrimonial intentions, and his proximity to an extensive family of equally mercenary nephews and nieces, had probably blinded Sir Harry to future contingencies ; or, more probably still, the offence given to the old merchant had been risked at a period of life when human clay has not altogether degenerated into mud, and the rank weeds of our vices and degenerations have not enrooted themselves inextricably in the soil. When the shabby old Sir Harry who succeeded to Sir Harry the jolly fox-hunter, began to perceive that ingots were ingots, even if amassed in a Liverpool counting-house, it was too late. He had lost that " tide in the affairs of man, which, taken at the flood," &c., &c., &c.

" But for my father's blunder in throwing down the cards before the game was up," mused

John Woolston, “or rather but for his narrow-mindedness in refusing to dig in the mine into which he had not scrupled to sink a shaft, I might never have stood in his shoes. And yet,” continued he,—his own self-love shrinking from the idea of being beholden to even a blunder of his father for his present property,—“had it not been for Roger Farmer’s good offices, one of those bull-headed cousins, to whom I was introduced this morning, and who bowed down before me as though to the golden calf, might have been preferred.—Who can say?—Who, *who* can say?—In such success as this world brings about, how difficult to decide on the *primum mobile*. ‘Fortune,’ says the proverb, ‘visits us in our sleep.’ And heaven knows, she found *me* involved in slumbers sufficiently uneasy.”

In addition to the “bull-headed cousins,” who, with grudging in their hearts, treated him with such servile reverence, Mr. Woolston found himself thrust into acquaintance with hosts of strangers, who called themselves friends of the

late Mr. Wraysbury ; men who had despised his crotchety vagaries while living, and who wondered at them, now he was dead ; but not more than the new heir, at the almost American abruptness of their tone, and complexity of their projects. He had never met with such people among the Northamptonshire squires. He had never met with such people among his sharp-witted professional brethren. But, looking upon them as the parents of railways, and sponsors for steam-navigation,—sires of Australia, and other golden worlds which Raleigh himself failed to appropriate,—he admitted the potentiality of the hand which he felt some scruple about shaking.

Nor did it require many days to render the old house as distasteful to him as was the company of his new associates.

For over all, there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted ;
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is haunted !

not haunted, like the crime-desecrated man-

sion so graphically described by poor Hood, with shrieking spirits or gory hands ; but with the consciousness of hopes defeated, and purposes left unaccomplished. Adam Wraysbury might, in his living days, have exchanged its gloomy walls for a palace. Yet he had maundered on, in gloomy obscurity, from day to day ; losing sight of the great dial of eternity, and forgetting to turn the golden sands of his own paltry hour-glass, till all that remained to him in possession consisted of a few feet of earth, surrounding a few planks of elm.

Even the objects purporting to rejoice the eye, had become dim and overcrusted, in the house of the professional money-maker. The broken panes of glass in an old-fashioned green-house, opening from his sitting-room, had been unrepaired for years ; so that not only had the birds of the air made it their refuge, but the rain had formed little tanks in the uneven brick flooring, in which to stagnate and grow fetid ; engendering a foul atmosphere, whose dampness

kept alive two or three spindled plants, accidentally left in the place ; the unnatural and solitary growth of which appeared a mockery.

Great was the relief to emerge from such a spot into the cheerful, well-ventilated, well-furnished rooms of the Adelphi Hotel ; where the rumour already prevalent, that the seedy-looking stranger was sole heir to the enormous fortune of the late Adam Wraysbury, secured him such fare and attendance as would have awaited a prince of the blood.

For though Woolston had enjoined the men of business to keep *secré* the contents of his kinsman's will, till probate was granted,—his heirship had previously transpired ; and as nothing remained to be concealed but the exact cypher of the property, the caution maintained by his solicitors served only to exaggerate his reported wealth. Nearly three millions was the sum vulgarly adduced. The fellow-townsmen of old Adam were in fact as proud of his wealth, as a provincial paper of some monstrous cabbage or

pumpkin "grown within the precincts of their county town."

The rumour, though it rendered the waiters alert, and secured the freshest and greenest of turtle and limes, to one whose scrag of mutton had of late been often rancid, did not lessen the pleasure to which he looked forward in rejoicing the kind hearts at Denny Cross with tidings of his luck. It is true that his pleasant anticipations were over-clouded by learning, in his parting interview with Messrs. Wortham and Stock, how Jew-like an advantage the firm were disposed to take of his situation. He even allowed himself to be a little harassed by hearing that considerable peculations were apparent in the household matters and counting-house of the deceased. For, already, the rich man was beginning to say to himself, according to the custom of rich men, that, "vast as was his fortune, he owed it to himself, and those who were to succeed him, not to allow any portion of it to be wasted or despoiled."

Still, though discomposed by the discovery that some hundreds, and even thousands, had been lawlessly abstracted from the amount which, when inscribed upon paper, whether in words or numerals, looked all but fabulous,—he was in far better spirits on quitting the city of docks, than when he hailed, in the distant horizon, its canopy of smoke. He was beginning to feel that the earth was as firm under his feet now his pockets were full, as when his pockets were empty: and laughed within himself, in spite of the grave faces of his fellow travellers, —each of whom was disfigured by the careworn look peculiar to a monied-man,—while concocting the mode and phrase in which to announce to dear Maria, that henceforth she was to be the rival of duchesses.

Was it the result of a sultry dog-day evening, or that, for some days past, he had been cherishing only gigantic ideas and projects, that the entrance gate at Denny Cross, which necessitated the descent of the Station fly-driver to open it,

struck him, for the first time, as sadly in want of a lodge?—And that, on approaching the old manor house, through a paddock in which a very heterogeneous assemblage of quadrupeds were grazing, something of his father's appreciation of a small squire and squiredom, made him wonder at the supineness with which the Penningtons had contented themselves, from age to age, with the mediocrity of their birthright?—But it mattered little. Maria was his, not theirs; and Maria should henceforward revel in those luxuries, which, in his early courtship, he had so longed to lay at her feet.

It mortified him, meanwhile, not a little, that, though he had expressly announced the hour of his arrival, no Maria met him at the paddock gate; no, nor even at the door of the house. But when the cause of her absence was explained, with a sorrowful countenance, by the kind-hearted Sophy, he would have given worlds that he had been really neglected. For alas! after rising at an untimely hour to see him off on his

departure for town, she had been attacked with a relapse of her Ramsgate fever.

The man whose exultation was thus suddenly stricken to the dust, had not courage to inquire whether his wife were actually in danger. But Sophy hastened to add that Mr. Gauntlett, (a chuckle-headed apothecary from the village, who had been long entrusted with the catarrhs and chilblains of the family), considered her illness unimportant; and that, with care, she would "do very well."

"Mr. Gauntlett considered? Why, his wife might as well be consigned to the doctoring of the village v^t., as to those of the putty-brained apothecary!"—

Almost before he had heard his sister-in-law to an end, a note was written and dispatched to Northampton, requiring the immediate attendance of Dr. Fermor, the first physician in the county.

Poor Sophy looked aghast. Dr. F. had never been summoned but once to Denny Cross; when

his visit made a sort of epoch in the family ; for it was on occasion of the fatal illness of their mother. She hesitated, however, to inquire of her anxious brother-in-law, whether he were provided with the twenty guineas that must be forthcoming for the great physician. Nothing doubting that, in his agitation he had overlooked this contingency, she determined to make up the money secretly among her brothers and sisters, in order that poor Woolston might not be put to shame.

On entering the sick chamber, the distracted husband felt inclined to back up his express to Northampton by another to London, for medical advice of even higher authority, so ghastly were the cheeks of the sufferer—so heavy her eyes. But he had not been seated ten minutes by the bed-side, before he would fain have recalled even the minor missive. Her looks lighted up, the moment she found her hand in his. His ill-explained absence had alarmed her, and produced her relapse ; and her head and heart were sud-

denly lightened again, on finding him again by her side, with sympathizing tears in his eyes.

Little Netta was now sent for ; whose prattle, for two previous days, her mother had been unable to bear. And oh ! how poor Woolston longed to whisper to the invalid, that the destinies of both mother and child were secured against all future overcloudings of pecuniary care.

But he dared not. The shock, however pleasant, might be injurious. Even Dr. Fermor, when he eventually made his appearance, desired that his patient might be kept strictly quiet. " Her indisposition was the result of over-tension of the nerves. Nothing but perfect tranquillity would restore her."

However tantalizing, therefore, the momentous secret must remain fermenting in his bosom ! For he would not so greatly wrong Maria and himself, as to allow it to ooze out to the family, before the person intitled to the first disclosure

had enjoyed her privilege. He compelled himself, therefore, to turn from his wife's chamber that she might doze unmolested, to listen to the domestic twaddle of the Penningtons, instead of dwelling upon his own gigantic prospects. He heard them discuss the twenty guineas given to the doctor, as though there were not another five-pound-note in the world. But why so impatient with the narrowness of their calculations? To himself, only a week before, the outlay would have appeared twice as ruinous!

But no sooner was he re-assured concerning Mrs. Woolston's condition, than worldly cares soon resumed their ascendancy. He had undertaken to meet the lawyers in London the following day; and till he was on the spot, nothing could he done. He dispatched letters, indeed, both to Liverpool and London, postponing the meeting, on the plea of serious illness in his family. But he could not help wishing that poor Maria's constitution

had not broken down at so very critical a moment.

He thought, perhaps of her inopportune indisposition, as Macbeth of the death of his lady,—that there might have been a “time for it hereafter.”

CHAPTER VI.

FORTUNATELY for the new millionaire, his wife, like the spouse of John Gilpin, possessed a frugal mind; and her dread lest prolonged sickness should necessitate a second twenty-guinea fee, conspired with the pleasant and cheerful countenance of her husband to produce rapid improvement. The lapse of a few days, therefore, enabled him to disclose so much of the state of his affairs, as that he had inherited from his uncle a considerable fortune, the amount of which was not at present exactly ascertainable; and that he must leave her for a short time to

execute certain forms connected with his inheritance.

Under such circumstances, his departure served almost as a restorative; for no small portion of Mrs. Woolston's nervous fever had arisen from the pressure of family difficulties, and the dread of becoming a burden to her family.

The simple-hearted Penningtons, meanwhile, accustomed to measure opulence by their father's comfortable income of fifteen hundred a-year, decided, while gossiping among themselves over Mr. Woolston's communication, that he had perhaps come into four or five thousand per annum; which, combined with the Harrals property, would hereafter render him one of the richest men in that part of the county.

Yet, notwithstanding this high assessment, they were a little alarmed when, some days after his departure for town, there arrived a box of toys and books for Netta, a cashmere shawl of some value for Netta's mother, and warrants for a couple of pipes of wine for Netta's grandpapa.

They prayed heaven that dear John might not be already becoming a spendthrift ; and scarcely liked to accept such costly gifts.

The moneyed man, meanwhile, was pre-occupied by very different solicitudes.

" Will you believe it, my dear Farmer," said he, to the friend to whom he rushed, on arriving in town, to express both his happiness and gratitude,—" will you believe that my sisters and brothers-in-law, who had long flung me aside like a last year's almanack, have already begun to overwhelm me with attentions ?"

" Of course they have. You did not surely expect to succeed to millions of money without the usual tax of hangers-on, who will beset you as a sugar-cask is infested by flies ?"

" I did not expect my own flesh and blood to betray such shabbiness."

" Not when forewarned by their having turned their backs on you in your adversity ?"

" Men like Molyneux and Harpsden should want courage to exhibit such bare-faced mean-

ness. Their letters of congratulation are positively as servile as those addressed by a mandarin of the first button to the cousin of the sun and moon !—The parson places himself at my feet.—The Honourable, which is still more offensive, affects to treat me as now, for the first time, on his level.”

“ And that very loose fish, Wroughton ?”

“ Is abroad, and has not yet heard of my sudden Croesus-ship, which the London papers learned from the Liverpool press. Yet I did everything in my power, when on the spot, to stifle the report.”

“ But *why* stifle it or affix so much importance to its results ? These little ebullitions of human weakness should serve to amuse you.”

“ Not while I bear in memory that a fifty-pound note vouchsafed by one of my sisters, might have afforded means to preserve the life of my poor boy !”

“ But did you apply to them ?—or did your frowardness estrange you from *them*, as from

myself?—Before all things, my dear Woolston, let us be just. The pride of poverty is almost as paltry a weakness as purse-pride: and in that respect, who shall bear you blameless? Take the advice of an old epicurean. Let by-gones be by-gones. Make the best of those connected with you, both great and small. Do not render uneasy a pathway paved, by the favour of providence, with gold and marble, by sowing thorns in the interstices."

John Woolston felt rebuked. But he endeavoured to defend himself by muttering something about "conscience-sake," and the "impossibility of reconciling earnestness of purpose with flexibility of principle. He could not for mere expediency pretend to be insensible to the insults offered to his wife."

"You will know better by and by, my dear John," said Farmer, patting him on the shoulder with a provoking air of superiority. "Time will teach you that it is scarcely worth while to add to the inevitable evils of this world, by stings

and bitternesses, as vexatious to those who inflict, as to those who suffer them. Peace and peace of mind are better things than all the retaliation in the world."

But on this point, his former pupil chose to think for himself; and when Mrs. Woolston was sufficiently recovered to take possession of the apartments he had engaged for her at the Clarendon Hotel, with the kind Sophy as her companion, his only prohibition regarded visits from his family.

Maria was a little inclined to remonstrate: for in her father's house, divisions in families were accounted sinful. Shy as she was, moreover, and enfeebled by recent illness, she felt that the support of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Molyneux, would, in the bewildering world she was about to enter, prove an incalculable advantage.

But her husband had now little leisure for domestic discussions. His time was bespoken by a pressure of business such as he had never fancied could devolve upon any other shoulders

than those of a Chancellor of the Exchequer ; and he was beginning to find the intrusions of his men of business quite as troublesome as he had ever found it to supervise the business of other people. If a little careless concerning the opinions and occupations of his wife, he probably fancied the consciousness of opulence a sufficient enjoyment.

As if that crowded metropolis were not to *her* as dreary as the desert !—As if, still mourning and still *in* mourning for the boy so fondly loved, she could find pleasure in gaudy shops, or crowded parks !—

One day, having dispatched Janetta and her aunt in the carriage to Kensington Gardens, to enjoy their daily exercise, poor Mrs. Woolston, while reclining despondingly on the sofa, began to tax herself, as with a crime, with the weariness of spirit that overwhelmed her. “Bored” was a word prohibited in the vocabulary of Denny Cross ; the good old squire asserting that the state of feeling it announced was an

offence against the Almighty, who has created so glorious a world for the enjoyment of the human race.

While she was still searching in her not very capacious mind for a synonym that described the lassitude of heart and soul arising from her recent trials and her strange displacement in life, the head waiter threw open the door, with an announcement which the rumbling of passing carriages rendered unintelligible ; and a rather handsome and very fashionably-attired woman advanced eagerly towards her.

Mrs. Woolston was thoroughly embarrassed ; for she felt that it could be only one of her husband's sisters who ventured to address her as " Maria." Her visitor was doubtless Mrs. Molyneux. Yet in the self-possessed lady before her, there was as little of the somewhat hoydenish baronet's daughter of the Northampton balls, as of the Squire of Denny Cross's rosy daughter, in her pale and low-voiced self.

" That poor John should have thrown himself

away on such an insignificant little dowdy!" was her sister-in-law's mental comment, after they had exchanged greetings.

"What a showy, bold-looking person, to be the daughter of poor old quiet Lady Woolston!" was, on the other hand, Maria's view of the case. And awkward and stammering became her assurances of regret that her husband was not at home to inaugurate their acquaintance.

"I did not come to see my brother. I came to see *you*, and scold *you*, and *you* only, for having been so long in town without apprising us," replied Mrs. Molyneux, with fluent assurance. "When you were established at Edmonton," she continued, (never having exactly realised to herself the locality of her brother's suburban retreat, which Gerald Molyneux comprised under the generic name of "back slums,")—"it was impossible for poor people like ourselves, possessing only one miserable attempt at a brougham-horse, to drive so far as a stage out of town. But on settling near us, you ought

really to have let me know where you were to be found. It is by mere accident that I discovered you."

Maria, veracity itself, answered what was seldom uttered in that lofty apartment—the exact truth. "Mr. Woolston was much hurt that you had taken so little trouble to find us out in our troubles. As you did not even write to condole with him on the death of his poor little boy, he did not wish just now to recal himself to your recollection."

"So like John!—John was always so touchy—always the oddest creature in the world," said the unabashed visitor, settling her numerous bracelets. "Why, I might as well pretend to be offended that he did not condescend to communicate to *us* the good fortune that has befallen him. I know nothing of it, except through the newspapers. Not a very affectionate mode of correspondence! However, I have overlooked *that*,"—she continued, with a smile of forbearance. "As far as Gerald and myself are con-

cerned, we are anxious that there should be an end to all family disunion ; and I have little doubt that, at our instigation, a general reconciliation might be managed. It is time that my brother should resume his natural position at Harrals."

"So I have long thought," said the astonished Maria. "But now, I confess I almost despair. My husband feels deeply hurt,—deeply injured,—and has lost all desire for the reunion to which we once looked fondly forward."

"At all events, you will not refuse your good offices towards promoting it," said Mrs. Molyneux, a little surprised at finding the broken reed possess more pith than she had anticipated. "Blessed, we are told, are the peace-makers. And if you and I, my dear Maria, set about establishing a general pacification, depend upon it, we succeed. The world will think us all the wiser; and *we*, I hope, shall feel the happier."

Her "dear Maria" sighed heavily. She was beginning to doubt whether any thing would

make her happier. The tardy condescensions of Harrals would scarcely suffice to warm up her disconsolate heart.

"And where is my little niece?" inquired Mrs. Molyneux, glancing round the vast half-furnished room, as if she expected to find her hid behind a chiffonnière, or ensconced in a china vase. "I am dying to see her. I have a boy four years older, and a little girl six months younger. Janetta must come and spend a day with her cousins."

Mrs. Woolston, who, till this proposal, had been rather irritated by her fine-lady sister-in-law's officious patronage, melted at the sound of her little daughter's name, pronounced for the first time by one of her nearest of kin. She had not fancied that it was even known to the cold-hearted Woolston family.

"Netta is gone to take a drive with my sister. I should like you to have seen her. She is thought quite a Woolston!" said she, more graciously.

"So much the worse for her, for we have no pretensions to hereditary beauty. But Gerald, who caught a glimpse of her yesterday in your carriage, as we were setting down John at the Alfred, told me she was as fair as daylight, which, you know, is distinctively a Pennington characteristic."

Till that moment, Maria had never fancied that the Penningtons possessed characteristics. No one had ever done poor Denny Cross the honour to suppose so. But she was inexpressibly pleased that Mr. Molyneux should have remarked the waxen complexion and flaxen locks of her pretty little girl.

"She will be four years old in a week or two," added Mrs. Molyneux, to the increasing surprise of her sister-in-law, to whose artless mind it never occurred that Emma and her husband had been studying the baronetage preparatory to the visit, and were well up in family dates.

"Yes, four years old in a fortnight," she

replied, much gratified. "John was saying to me this morning, that we ought to be looking out for a nursery governess for her. But I hardly know where they are to be found."

"I know of the very person to suit you," exclaimed Mrs. Molyneux, with suddenly-kindled animation. "A clergyman's orphan daughter in reduced circumstances, brought up in one of our best educational institutions, under the patronage of my mother-in-law, Lady Dinton. She obtained, on leaving it, a situation in a nobleman's family; but the little girl of whom she had the care, a charming child—an only child—was carried off, a few months ago, by a fever."

Mrs. Woolston's sympathies were instantly enlisted. She began to question and cross-question her sister-in-law, not respecting the governess, but the child; its age, its symptoms, its sorrowing parents; and by details sufficiently melancholy, Mrs. Molyneux unconsciously effected the conquest of her heart.

Before they parted, it was settled that Emma should make all necessary inquiries concerning the salary and pretensions of the incomparable Miss Avesford ; and that, her father permitting, Janetta should dine with her cousins the following day.

Poor child !—She had yet to learn that already, as an heiress in perspective, she was condemned to the *peine forte et dure* of a Patent Governess !—

CHAPTER VII.

ON Sophy Pennington's return from her drive, though pleased to find her sister's cheek flushed and her eyes glistening with emotion, she could not help intimating her fears that Mr. Woolston would resist the engagement formed for his little girl. For Sophy argued on such insufficient grounds as principle and consistency ; and little knew what trivial inducements suffice to render people of the world untrue to their code of morality. John Woolston arrived at home to dinner still more flushed than his wife, in the best of temper and spirits. After a long

morning's wrangle with his men of business, he had succeeded in proving himself intitled to a sum of seventeen thousand pounds in railway stock, beyond what they had carried to his credit ; and small as was this amount compared with the enormous bulk of his newly-acquired wealth, yet, as having been made out by his unassisted perspicacity, he seemed to value it more than all the rest of his property.

When, in the course of dinner, Maria, with fear and trembling, alluded to his sister's visit, it was with the utmost difficulty she could get him to listen. Instead of bursting into angry reprehension, as predicted by Sophy, he kept smiling to himself, like Malvolio ; thinking far more of his railway stock than of Gerald Molyneux, or all his tribe.

But when she proceeded to state that a governess for Netta was about to be secured for them by his sister, he inclined his ear to listen. *That* was too serious a consideration to be trifled with. A clergyman's daughter

in reduced circumstances, turned adrift by the death of her pupil, sounded pleasantly enough. But the Molyneuxes, both husband and wife, were general-dealers in plausibilities. And though too much in charity just then with himself and all the world, to harass his wife by opposing so small an advance towards a family reconciliation as was to be made by allowing his little girl to eat her roast mutton and rice-pudding in Wilton Place, he bargained, in return for the concession, that Maria would not commit herself as regarded an engagement with Miss Avesford.

The Gerald Molyneuxes were a couple of no rare occurrence among the brilliant triflers of the day ; though they might have found better acceptance in society a quarter of a century ago. After undergoing as much flogging, boating, and cricketing at Eton as was due to the second son of an English earl, Gerald Molyneux had been prepared at Sandhurst for the commission already waiting for him in the Guards. Re-

markably good-looking, his ingrained selfishness was fostered by the attentions showered on him upon his entrance into the fashionable world, where a liberal allowance rendered his life a pleasant one; and but that, at a Hunt-ball, one snowy Christmas, at which, his lady-mother being patroness, he was obliged to exhibit the light of his countenance, he had allowed his fancy to be captivated by the fair face of the eldest daughter of Sir Harry Woolston, he would probably have gone on mounting guard through a score of London seasons, till he attained that fossil condition which, in time of peace, characterizes the higher grade of household epaulets.

In a London ball-room, he would have seen her without peril. But viewed in all the distinction of her débüt in a country ball-room, where, his own two sisters being still unrepresented, she was the heroine of the night, his heart was slightly singed. A few days at Harrows, where both the stable and billiard-table were

ing that, on the continent, their income of *vingt cinq mille francs de rentes* would place every luxury within their reach, they accordingly established themselves at Paris ;—where six pleasant months exhausted their year's income.

A lucky, or rather *unlucky coup* at play kept them going for a time ; and enabled Emma to perfect herself in the art of dress and other superficial accomplishments, no where so readily acquired as in the atmosphere of the Faubourg St. Honoré. But the moment Fortunatus's purse was exhausted, he discovered that, with empty pockets, a metropolis which comprehends every earthly delight and enjoyment, save that of credit, was far harder to live in than the more sober-suited capital of his native land ; where his father's son commanded a most unjustifiable margin of trust.

They returned to England, therefore, to quarter themselves and their ennui, throughout the winter, at Molyneux Castle ; and cajole from Lord Dinton the means of spending a brilliant

season in one of the little ready-furnished caskets of Belgravia. Their beautiful children were the pets of the neighbouring square, and of their aunts Lady Mary and Lady Jemima ; and Mrs. Woolston when, the following day, she fulfilled her engagement of introducing little Netta to her cousins, felt inexpressibly mortified by the contrast afforded by the poor shy child in her black frock, to the noisy boy and flighty girl, whose gay but becoming costumes savoured more of the masquerade than of the nursery.

Happy and impetuous, the little Molyneuxes seized upon their timid little cousin, rather as a victim than a playmate ; and Maria, who saw her colour rise and her breath come short, so little was she accustomed to the rough companionship customary to her age, was sadly afraid that a burst of tears would crown the introduction.

But poor little Netta was too much frightened to cry. She submitted heroically to have her bonnet torn off, and to be dragged by Edgar

and Theodosia to their playroom ; and poor Maria dared not express her wish to accompany them, for the protection of the frightened child. But on finding herself *tête-à-tête* with her sister-in-law, Mrs. Molyneux's pleasant manners and cheerful voice soon obliterated her anxieties. As a mere acquaintance, Emma was as agreeable as is usually the case with people of whom tact is the leading characteristic. Had she married Mr. Harpsden, the Curate of Harrals,—so disastrously matched with her sister, an invalid in body and mind,—her energies of nature would, perhaps, have converted her into an active parson's wife. At all events, had her own rash marriage been delayed, the routine of respectability maintained at Harrals would have imparted some consistency to her volatile mind. As it was, she had married at eighteen, before her principles were formed ; and, under the influence of Gerald Molyneux, had degenerated into an inferior being ;—one of those glittering molecules developed by a factitious order of society.

Her husband had enjoined her to spare no pains to conciliate the wife of the brother, whose miraculous affluence had suddenly become the talk and marvel of the day; and it was no small comfort to find the rustic sister-in-law she was required to take to her heart, as free from vulgarity as guile. Maria satisfied her prying questions with the artlessness of a child.

"It is really unlucky," observed Emma carelessly, "that your mourning, and the lateness of your arrival in town, will prevent your being presented at court this season."

"Presented at court?" repeated Mrs. Woolston, uncertain whether she had heard rightly.

"When settled in town, you will find it indispensable.—My mother-in-law, Lady Dinton, will, I am sure, be delighted to present you."—

"I hope that John will make up his mind to reside in the country," rejoined Maria.

"Of course. Every body resides in the country, when the London season is over. And

pray who supplies your diamonds?—For John must really give you some. My mother's, though good enough for the wife of a country baronet, are quite unequal to your present splendid fortune."

"I have never even thought of it," replied Maria, a little shocked by the hardness of her tone. "I often wonder why people care so much for jewels."

"Because you have not moved in the sphere to which they are appropriate.—You will learn to prize them in time.—Have them, you *must*."—

Mrs. Woolston was beginning to think these numerous "*musts*,"—this indispensable house in town and suit of brilliants,—a sad and singular drawback on wealth and independence. Again, she expressed a hope that John would be induced to settle in the country.

"He is about to purchase a place, then?—Or did old Wraysbury leave estates on which he can build?"—

"I have never inquired. My husband is so

harassed with business of all kinds, that I do not trouble him with superfluous questions."

Mrs. Molyneux had hardly supposed that such supine stupidity as that of her new sister, could be incarnate in female nature.—

"Just now," added Maria, finding that she did not reply,—"he is occupied at the College of Arms, about the registration of our change of name."

It was now the turn of Mrs. Molyneux to reiterate—"Change of name?—What change?"

"I should have said addition to our name. By his uncle's will, my husband is required to adopt that of Wraysbury."

"Of Wraysbury?—Of an all but shopkeeper?"—

"Such were the old gentleman's conditions. And few people would grumble at them, when accompanied by a legacy of more than a million and a half of money."

Mrs. Molyneux sat dumb and motionless. It was her first intimation of the enormous amount

of her brother's inheritance. It was her first certification of the shabbiness of her own legacy.

"My brother may not grumble at them," said she, unwilling to betray the origin of her disturbance. "But what will be my father's feelings?—Such an insult to the Woolstons of Harrals!—The old title to be merged in the obscure name of a Liverpool drysalter!"

"If we should never have another son," said Maria, timidly, "I understand that the title and estate of Harrals devolve upon some distant cousin of Sir Harry?"—

"Yes,—the Wiltshire Woolstons. But you will have dozens of sons!"

"Even, in that case," rejoined her sister-in-law, smiling at her prediction, "the family title would remain uninjured. The Wraysbury estate and name descend only to a second son: or failing one, to our eldest daughter."

"To Janetta?—Little Netta actually heiress to nearly seventy thousand a year?—I bespeak her for Edgar!" cried Mrs. Molyneux, resuming

her previous levity. "I adopt her from this moment as a daughter-in-law!"—

"But since her poor husband would have to assume the name of the Liverpool drysalter?" was Maria's *almost* arch reply.

"Oh! *we*, you know, are spendthrifts and beggars, and would do it for half the money. Nor are either the present or the next Lord Dinton at all bigoted to their emblazonments. It is only country baronets, like my poor father, who hang up their pedigree in their hall, and worship their own consequence. But we must try to reconcile him, my dear Maria, to the idea of a Mr. and Mrs. Woolston Wraysbury. Meanwhile, let us go and rescue the little heiress, my future daughter-in-law, from being killed with kindness by her cousins!"

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a great triumph for the new man of millions when his old friend, Farmer, was, after much persuasion, induced one day at the close of the season, to forego for once Mrs. Dalgairns and her pepperpot, and traverse the few hundred yards intervening between the Albany and the Clarendon, to dine with "Mr. and Mrs. Woolston Wraysbury." The hotel had been selected for his domicile, in the hope that such occurrences might have been more frequent. But even on this solitary occasion, Farmer had ceded to his entreaties only from a desire to see some-

thing of the womankind who were likely to influence the future career of his friend. No one understood better than the old bachelor, that, actively or passively, the women of a house assign its tone and colouring; a consideration, which had, perhaps, been the means of keeping him single.

It was strictly a family dinner; little Netta appearing with the strawberries, and at a slight signal from her father, disappearing again with her mother and aunt so shortly afterwards, as to cause a very agreeable surprise to the guest.

"That little creature is not yet spoiled, I see," he observed, when the door closed after them. "If she should hereafter become wilful, it will be the fault of those about her. I never saw a gentler child."

"Netta is more than gentle—she is feeble and subdued," replied his friend. "The nursery quietude required by her brother's infirmities repressed the natural elasticity of childhood. We are none of us very lively people. Even Sophy

Pennington, at twenty, has more the character of a mat than of a girl. However, we shall all be freshened up shortly. Sir Pottifer Hampson has prescribed Marienbad for my wife; and as even my lawyers have asked for a respite during the next blank month or two, we start for the continent on Monday next."

A sarcastic smile played on the lips of old Farmer. "Already Marienbad and Sir Pottifer!" he muttered, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "Your wife would have done wonderfully well without Marienbad, my dear John, had her name remained Woolston instead of Wraysbury; particularly when you have so many calls and claims, just now, to detain you in England."

"On the contrary, all the urgent part of my business is transacted."

"What do you call the urgent part?"

"All in which my personal investigation and signature is indispensable. The trustees named

by old Adam are now, to a certain degree, in charge of the property."

"But surely you acknowledge duties unconnected with these mercenary interests?"

"You would scarcely, my dear Farmer, have me hurry, at a moment's notice, into political life,—especially with my hands already overburthened with private business?"

"I was not thinking of politics. I was not thinking of public life."

"What, then, would you have me do?"

"Arise and go to your father. He is at a precarious time of life. You must not let him slip out of the world, John, without having taken you by the hand."

"His health is much the same as usual. Maria heard good accounts of him the other day, from one of my sisters."

"You are now in a position," resumed Farmer, "to come forward and solicit a reconciliation, without incurring the imputation of interested motives. Even your pride has its salvo.

Take my advice, and before you trouble your head about German baths, carry your wife and child straight down to Harrals. Sir Harry has never seen the little girl."

"Nor ever expressed the slightest wish to see her.—No, no.—Time enough to go through the vexation of such an interview when I can show him a son and heir, and ask his blessing for the future Woolston of Harrals."

"The son and heir may never make its appearance; and, as I said before, your father's life is precarious."

"At all events," retorted Mr. Wraysbury, "I shall not make an attempt that would entail a thousand stormy recriminations, at a moment when Maria is not in a state of health to confront unusual excitement. I shall be absent only for a few weeks—at the utmost, a couple of months. On my return, I will see about complying with your suggestion."

"The delay of a few days, for the purpose of visiting Northamptonshire previous to your

departure, would surely be of no great moment.”

“ So little, that we are actually going to Denny Cross to leave my little girl with her grandfather. We do not wish to expose the child to the fatigues and hazards of a long journey, this hot weather.”

“ You seem kinder to *her* than to yourselves. But it is true, children are sad nuisances in travelling,” added Farmer, with another sarcastic smile.—“ Does Miss Pennington accompany you?”—

“ Maria, in her delicate state, can ill afford to dispense with her company. But Richard Pennington, a narrow-minded squire of the old school, has a horror of what he calls ‘forren parts.’ Even Sophy is little disposed for the tour. She would prefer remaining at home to take care of her little niece. However, some sacrifice is due to her sister. And I shall never be able to reconcile Maria to the expedition, unless I secure her company.”

"Your wife, then, is not the instigator of this German bath expedition? I was afraid it had arisen from the fashionable Hygienoculture, which appears to be one of the manias of the day."

"You have formed a very mistaken idea of the Penningtons," said Wraysbury, laughing heartily at the supposition, "if you suppose any one of them likely to be fashion-bitten. The most plain-dealing matter-of-fact people in the world!"—

"A sensible family!—Let us drink their health," rejoined Farmer, gravely. "I am beginning to think, John, that your father may have been in the wrong. But *that* is no reason why, at eighty and a bittock, he should not have his pardon begged by a rebellious son."

"Still, you must admit," said Wraysbury, replying to the former clause of his speech the better to overlook the latter, "that my wife must now learn to enlarge her sphere of social enjoyments?"

"If you leave it to *her* to define what she understands by the word enjoyment. So much of that sort of thing is relative to our individual health, strength, and circumstances. I remember (excuse me for recalling it to your mind), the only time you dined with me in the Albany, your gazing round my chambers as we sat *tête-à-tête* over our wine, and observing that your notion of human happiness extended no further than my position in life;—as comprising competence, peace of mind and body, and literary leisure."

John Wraysbury smiled.—He remembered it well. But he also remembered the vortex of domestic anxieties from which he had emerged, to enjoy the feast of reason and pepperpot, and flow of soul and Léoville, afforded him by his learned friend.

"You added," said Farmer, unconsciously forming on the table-cloth a dissected map of devilled biscuit, "that, could you command your time and purse, your utmost desire was to live as I did. But I told you then, my dear fellow,

with my usual uncivil frankness, that for such a life you were unfitted ; that *I* was a self-made man, with few friends and only distant relatives, and free from all family ties upon my time. In short, that my egotism was privileged. Whereas, *you* owed, and still owe yourself to your country and your county, your parents and your children ;—with real property to tax your attention, and a definite position in society, to whose duties you are harnessed.”

Wraysbury bowed and smiled, but of all this remembered nothing. The avalanche of wealth which had fallen upon him in the interim, had crushed the corner-cupboard wisdom of his prosy friend out of his memory.

“ But this was not all I ventured to say,” continued Farmer, fancying, from the silence of his companion, that he was making an impression. “ I told you that you had neither the moderation of mind nor phlegmatic habit of body, in which I rejoice, to enable you to content yourself with a life of rumination and reverie.

And though you denied it then, and with some vehemence, you will probably admit by this time that you would as soon be an old cow moping over a hedge, as Roger Farmer in his solitary chambers."

Though far from of a jocular turn, Wraysbury laughed outright; so justly had the old lawyer interpreted what was passing in his thoughts.

" And this proves," resumed his guest, coming at length to his moral, " that, like most other people, you are the slave of circumstances, not the master of your opinions. But if yours have changed, my dear Wraysbury, as regards the comparative satisfaction of lounging away the afternoon in one's easy chair, or by one's fireside, with the last new work of merit on one's reading - desk, and a wholesome dinner and sound wine in prospect,—and galloping over a bad road harnessed by straw-tied ropes to four cart-horses, at the will and pleasure of a belaced courier, prepared to pick your pocket or cut your throat, as occasion serves,—in order to imbibe

nauseous draughts which you could obtain quite as nasty and efficacious at the nearest apothecary's—" Again, Wraysbury interrupted him by a hearty laugh; which ceased, however, when Roger Farmer quietly added,—“ why not also renounce your obstinacy and obduracy as regards Sir Harry Woolston ?”—

“ Why not, indeed !”— retorted his host, “ except that I am, as you imply, a huffy, obstinate brute ! Let us hope, however, that among the cures about to be operated in the family by the Marienbad waters, may be that of my taste and temper.”

He then, though the claret pitcher remained three parts full, proposed joining the ladies; a suggestion which, as he anticipated, had the effect of deciding Roger Farmer to ask for his hat and great coat. “ He had business that necessitated his being at home early.”

But though Wraysbury had turned so deaf an ear to the counsels of his old master, they had found some kind of secret channel to his

heart. Though pride, the master-passion, prevented his adopting the advice so officiously offered, it rang in his ears throughout his hurried journey to Denny Cross.

" You will probably repent when it is too late," had been Farmer's parting words to his former pupil. " How will you presume, hereafter, to inculcate in your daughter the virtue of filial duty, when she has discovered how little of the pious *Æneas* was exhibited by her father!"

The lesson touched him still more nearly, when he saw how instinctively his right-thinking wife renounced her claim to the companionship of her sister in her impending tour, the moment Mr. Pennington expressed a wish for Sophia to remain in England, in charge of his little granddaughter.

" Impossible to accomplish a meeting with my father and mother at a moment's notice," mused he, while Maria was taking a tearful leave of her family, and dared not trust herself

to take leave of her child. "But the moment I return to England, I will see how it can be managed with least emotion to the old gentleman, and least mortification to myself."

Rich or poor, he seemed determined to accredit Roger Farmer's accusation of wanting the decision and promptitude of mind, enabling a man to do the right thing at the right moment, which is one of the indispensable attributes of genius. No time or plan could, in fact, be more propitious to a reconciliation between himself and the old baronet, than the moment when scarcely twenty miles divided them; and the three sons-in-law who had so largely assisted to maintain Sir Harry's resentments, were too busy in appropriating to their necessities old Adam Wraysbury's trifling legacy, to take the smallest heed of Harrals. The fort was unguarded. He had only to step in with a flag of truce in his hand, either singly, or with his wife and child, and a general peace would have been concluded.

Next day, when bowling along the Dover road, in company with the gentle, silent woman, who, with moistened eyes and her veil down to conceal them, reclined in the corner of the carriage, wondering whether her darling Netta were enjoying the cheerful old nursery at Denny Cross, as much as she herself had done in days of yore, he already regretted that he had not obeyed the impulse of which he had been conscious ere he quitted Northamptonshire ;—to ride over to Harrals, and, even if not admitted to an interview with his father, to consult old Wardlaw and the aged housekeeper, Sir Harry's contemporary, concerning the state of his health, spirits, and feelings. But even as, four years before, he had declared it to be too late for pacific overtures, he now declared it to be too early : and again glanced at the possibility of a male heir, or male heirs, to reconcile the house of Harrals to the name of Wraysbury.

The Channel once crossed, he ceased to think of the subject at all. A total change of scenery

and personages exercised its usual happy influence. Half the salutary results of travel, especially of foreign travel, are chiefly referrible to this exorcism of domestic spectres.

It was something to a man of late so harassed by business, to find the care of himself and his wife thoroughly taken out of his own hands by the belaced courier denounced by Roger Farmer; who, on finding that his *Herrschaft* were guiltless of foreign languages, and not very voluble in their own,—mere *nouveaux riches*, whose passport did not intitle him to inscribe them in the arrival lists of the hotels as so much, or rather so little, as “milor” and “milédi,”—began to treat them as children, and instruct them “what to eat, drink, and avoid;”—leaving them little more liberty of action than is assigned to lunatics, crowned heads, and other irresponsible persons.

CHAPTER IX.

"BUT you do not mean," observed old Lady Dinton to her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Molyneux, who at the close of the summer usually took down her children to grass at Molyneux Castle, while her husband enjoyed himself on the Moors,—“ You surely do not mean, my dear Emma, that your brother has gone abroad without reconciling himself to his parents ?”

“ He is gone only to the German Baths ; for which the season is so short, that delay was impossible.”

“ Impossible ?—With such an object to be accomplished ?”

" My brother's first object, just now, is the health of his wife. It is everything to them, that a healthy boy should replace the one they lost last spring.—Harrals is entailed on heirs male."

" Yes,—as I have heard your husband very unreasonably complain."

" Even the splendid fortune lately inherited by my brother, can only descend to his little girl, or a second son. It will otherwise fall into the hands of some Wraysbury cousin."

It was not of *this* the worthy old Countess was thinking.—She was shocked at so wilful a perpetuation of the family feud. For the Dintons were wholesome, simple-minded people. The conduct and principles of their son Gerald had more than once startled and shocked them. But over his elders it could not, of course, exercise the same demoralizing influence as over his wife. They did not understand his slang, they did not sanction his habits ; and anxious, indeed, would Emma have been, had half his offences

and imprudencies been likely to reach the ears of the Earl and Countess. Her children, docked of half their finery, were kept in some degree of order, while sojourning at the Castle;—and in order to excuse her repugnance to visit her own people and her father's house, she assured her grave mother-in-law that the intelligence which had reached her ladyship of Sir Harry Woolston's increased illness and infirmities, was mere country gossip and exaggeration.

“Gerald proposes to accompany us there in October, on his return from the Highlands,” said she, without adverting to the excellent covert-shooting, which would just then impart a charm even to Harrals. “By that time, my brother and his wife will perhaps have been invited to join the family party.”

“I am vastly glad to hear it, my dear. The reunion cannot take place too soon,” rejoined Lady Dinton, credulously. “Nothing appears to me more unaccountable than family estrangement among persons of birth and edu-

cation, who owe an example to the inferior classes."

This was, in fact, somewhat too much the code of Dinton morality. The Countess considered herself a flugelwoman set up to regulate the morals of the county, of which her father and husband had been successively lords lieutenant; and her daughters would not have undergone half the Berlin work and syntax with which their girlhood had been smothered, but that the Countess held it a duty to keep them a language and a yard or two of canvas ahead of the most accomplished young lady of the shire. She fancied that unless Lady Jemima and Lady Mary had wrought in curious tent-stitch the great ottoman in the green drawing-room at Molyneux Castle, little Miss Titmouse at the Parsonage might never have undertaken her hassocks, the pride of the parish-church.

But this was Lady Dinton's only weakness. She was a kindly-natured woman, thinking and speaking no guile; and wanted all the world to

be as blameless and painstaking as herself. Sprung from one of those blue-blood lines of English aristocracy, concerning the existence of which foreigners are as incredulous as though, till the days of the Stuarts, the Anglo-Saxons were a race of slopsellers, and their little island one vast counter,—the Countess discerned less distinction between Harrals and Denny Cross, than was perceptible to their owners. Sir Harry Woolston, indeed, had in some degree, forfeited caste, in their eyes, by intermarrying with Liverpool; whereas, the late Mrs. Pennington was daughter to a well-born Colonel of Dragoons. And though Richard Pennington, the occupation of whose life, when not busy with his farm, consisted of drumming slightly with his knuckles on the nearest article of furniture, as an accompaniment to a perpetual humming of what he conceived to be tunes, (a curious medley of Hearts of Oak, Christmas anthems, and the British Grenadiers,) was as unpolished as his own boots, the surly baronet of Harrals was

almost as desultory in his dialogue as the good-humoured squire in his melodies.—In real humanity of nature, the latter was many cubits nearer the sky.

But upon the comparative merits of the offspring of both their houses, Lady Dinton, accustomed to seek peace and ensue it, did not, her son having married into the Woolston family, permit herself to pronounce judgment.

She could scarcely bring herself, indeed, to sympathise in Gerald's angry lamentations at being so shabbily treated in Adam Wraysbury's will. The old man's prodigious fortune, she understood, had been amassed in a grovelling manner, in petty trade; and though, like the fertile vine in the palace garden at Hampton Court, the fruit displayed no token of its unsavoury origin, Lady Dinton, whose well-regulated life and fortune had never acquainted her with the want of a five-pound note, was secretly of opinion, that her daughter-in-law's brother would have held a more respectable position as

Woolston of Harrals, with eight thousand a year in land held by the family for the last four centuries, than as Wraysbury of Nomansland, with seventy thousand. To *her*, the factious and whimsical wants of Belgravia, and the avidity which they create, were unknown.

Though accustomed to accept the catastrophes of life with passive philosophy, she was keen enough, when a principle was to be carried out or a duty discharged; and conscious how deeply it would grieve her if Lady Mary or Lady Jemima were capable of enjoying their breakfast, luncheon, and dinner, with the lively appetite exhibited by Mrs. Gerald, when she or Lord Dinton were pronounced to be in a precarious state, she could not help occasionally reminding Emma, that an absence of four-and twenty hours from her children, would enable her to visit Harrals, and secure what might be a last interview with poor old Sir Harry.

But Mrs. Molyneux assured her that such a visit would be rather an annoyance to her pa-

rents than a satisfaction ; that they had their own hours and habits, which must not be invaded ; and that her brother-in-law, Mr. Harpsden, who resided at the Rectory, within a few hundred yards of the house, would look with a jealous eye on her unauthorised arrival.—“ Time enough, on Gerald’s return.”

It was, however, some weeks before her husband’s return, that a letter was one day placed in her hands, brought over by express from Harrals ; requesting her immediate attendance on her mother, who since the sudden death of Sir Harry Woolston, the preceding night, had been in a speechless condition. A hurried departure was, of course, instantly prepared for. But Lady Dinton’s surprise was far greater than she chose to express, at hearing her daughter-in-law inveigh against the barbarity and neglect of the Harpsdens, in having failed to apprise her in time of her father’s condition. She was too good a Christian to say, “ My dear, I warned you ;” too forbearing to observe that the instincts

of filial affection ought to have rendered warning superfluous.

Arrived at Harrals, Mrs. Molyneux found that her presence was indeed indispensable. Lady Woolston was in a state of either catalepsy or paralysis. From the moment she was aware of her husband's death, she had become unconscious of anything else. For forty years long, this most submissive of wives had never been known to exercise a will of her own ; and now that the ruling influence was withdrawn, the very life-springs within her seemed to be broken. She lay with her eyes closed, in a half-torpid condition ; nearly as much a corpse as the body in an adjoining chamber, of which the undertakers had already taken possession.

"But my sister ;—why is not my sister here?"—inquired Mrs. Molyneux, when Harpsden, with an air of sanctimonious depression, acquainted her with the instantaneous nature of Sir Harry's fatal seizure while the paper brought by the second post was being read aloud to him by his wife.

"Poor Carry is confined to her room. Poor Carry is, as usual, suffering from her autumnal ague. It would be death to her to leave the house," replied the plausible rector. "But it is rather hard upon me, at so trying a moment, to have so many responsibilities thrown on my shoulders; the Wraysburys and Wroughtons on the continent—Molyneux in the Highlands,—my wife disabled,—no one but myself to issue orders. Now you have come, Emma, you must at least relieve me from the charge of your mother."

"I have not been slow to obey your summons," replied Mrs. Molyneux, coldly; "and had you signified to me, before, that my presence would be acceptable, I should probably have been present at my poor father's last moments."

"Sir Harry did not wish to be disturbed. He avoided as much as possible all allusion to his family."

"Still, my brother would not have gone abroad, nor should I have remained so quietly

at Molyneux Castle, had we dreamed he was so near his end."

"Who, my dear Emma, could surmise it? Inscrutable are the decrees of Providence! Though for the last six years my whole life has been, I may say, devoted to the comfort and consolation of poor Sir Harry, visiting him daily, and holding my time, as far as my professional duties would permit, at his disposal, I discerned of late no peculiar change in him. He talked, perhaps, a little more than usual of John. But that naturally arose from the remarkable circumstances which rendered your brother the theme of general conversation. Sir Harry's bodily health was in its normal condition."

"But to die without one of his children in the house!—What a scandal to the world!—How we shall all be abused!"

"The world will know nothing of the matter. The family will, I trust, be united at the last mournful ceremony. Within an hour after

Sir Harry breathed his last, I dispatched an express to Messrs. Rothschild, to beg they would send off a courier to your brother at Frankfort."

"But how do you know that John is at Frankfort?"

"His arrival there was announced in the very paper Lady Woolston was reading to your poor father when his fit came on. And as the Wroughtons are spending their summer, as usual, at Homburg, it is probable they will travel home together. They will perhaps be here by Saturday or Sunday—at all events, in time for the funeral; the arrangement of which, I have, of course, taken on myself. All else must wait for the arrival and decision of Sir John."

Cold-blooded as she was, it caused a thrill in the veins of Mrs. Molyneux, to hear the title assigned to her brother which certified that their father was numbered with the dead. Her lips refused to frame the inquiry she had been meditating concerning the disposal of his property.

But Harpsden was deterred by no such feelings of delicacy.

"I was apprised some months ago, by Henderson and Hall," said he, lowering his voice, lest it might reach the ears of Lady Woolston's attendants, in the adjoining room, "that Sir Harry's will was deposited in their custody; and as there is nothing to necessitate a premature examination of the document, *there* it had better remain till his son and successor is on the spot. With a property so strictly entailed, I almost wonder, poor man, that your father thought it necessary to make one."

Emma did not choose to suggest, what he knew better than herself, that Sir Harry's savings must have been considerable. But she felt persuaded, from Harpsden's air of self-possessed resignation, that the contents of the will were as familiar to him as they were satisfactory.

From the time his assiduities placed him in such complete possession of the confidence of

Sir Harry, Harpsden had been no great favourite with the rest of the family ; and now, there was something so stealthy in the manner in which he went about his melancholy duties in the house, as thoroughly to disgust his sister-in-law. She felt convinced he had been playing a shabby part ; or what, in her hasty letter to her husband, she described as “ feathering his nest.” For the Woolstons, crossed with Wraysbury, were a mercenary race ; and even under the dread presence of death, could not lose sight of the pecuni osities connected with the crisis.

Yet, in the dreary six days intervening between her own arrival at Harrals, and that of her brother, there was enough to subdue a spirit even as mercurial as that of Mrs. Molyneux, into a holier mood. The poor wasted mother, dying by inches before her eyes, was sufficiently conscious of her presence to press her hand thankfully, in acknowledgment of her tardy attentions ; and, as if in deference to the speechlessness of the death-stricken widow, every other voice in the

house was hushed to a whisper. All was still in the vast cheerless old mansion ; and but that, on the third night after Sir Harry's decease, the night when his coffin was closed and the watch-lights extinguished, equinoctial gales began to blow, which seemed to shake it to its foundations,—Emma Molyneux, stationed beside Lady Woolston's bed, might have wondered what had become of the dispiriting noises which used to strike awe into her childhood.

When a girl, she had detested Harrals ; nor had the voice of affection, at any subsequent moment, recalled her to her early home, to enjoy it as Denny Cross was enjoyed by the tender-hearted Maria. Unblinded, therefore, by natural partiality, she saw the old place as it was, dilapidated and forlorn ; her sense of its imperfections quickened by the higher notions of comfort she had acquired at Molyneux Castle, or amid the superficial graces of Parisian life.

“Lucky for poor John,” thought she, as she surveyed the discoloured paint and paper, the

faded carpet and cracked ceiling of the chamber nearest to Lady Woolston's, assigned to her use, "that this prodigious fortune of his has come in time to enable him to rebuild the family seat. These walls seem scarcely able to hold together."

During the day-time, the cawing of the rooks wore down her spirits. Throughout the night, the howling of the wind was still more appalling. But that she dared not, for fear of the world's reproof, desert the bedside of her paralysed mother, willingly would she have betaken herself to the Rectory, to listen to what, at other times, she especially avoided,—the tedious egotism of poor Carry's sick-room. The details of her perpetual ailments would have been preferable to the dismal echoes of the house of death.

At length, on the very eve of the funeral, the rattle of an arrival shook the yew hedges of the court-yard. Voices were heard in the hall, and steps on the stairs ; and after a little whispering

in the corridor, John Wraysbury, escorted by Harpsden, entered his mother's room, and placed himself reverently on his knees by her bed-side. Too late, however, for recognition ! During the last four-and-twenty hours she had ceased even to grasp the hand of her daughter. Her life was at its last ebb ; and the household had already began to whisper in the servants' hall, that the funeral of their late master ought to be postponed, in order that the aged couple might be laid together in the grave.—Such had been the subservience of the timid Lady Woolston to her wedded lord, that she dared not survive him !—

CHAPTER X.

THERE was no hypocrisy in the demonstrations of grief with which John Wraysbury humiliated himself beside his mother's dying pillow and his father's coffin. He was thoroughly self-rebuked. He could not forgive the obduracy with which he had turned a deaf ear to the remonstrances of Farmer, and the suggestions of his own heart. His father ought not to have died without a mutual exchange of forgiveness. As regarded himself, it was a fault he must repent to the latest day of his life.

Fain would he have avoided the painful ne-

cessity of bringing his wife, for the first time, to Harrals, under sanction, as it were, of the helplessness of the dead ; by dispatching her, from the last posting stage to Denny Cross. But of this, though eager to clasp her darling again in her arms, Maria would not hear. She knew that her husband was about to undergo a thousand trials which it was her duty to be at hand to alleviate. The new Lady Wraysbury, like her predecessor at Harrals, was prepared to fulfil to the letter of the law of God, her marriage vow.

The afflicted man, therefore, possessed a solace denied to two of his sisters. For Gerald Molyneux had not found it convenient to curtail his engagements in the north to comply with the summons of his wife ; nor had Wroughton thought it necessary to accompany *his*, since she was able to travel under the protection of her brother. Both sisters, however, were too much engrossed by the critical state of their surviving parent, whose life seemed to hang on a thread,

to remark that they were alone together, for the first time since their respective marriages ; as guests, too, of the brother whose boyish life they had made so miserable under that roof, by turning to their advantage the preference systematically accorded by Sir Harry to his daughters.

The dreaded day of the funeral came and passed ; and poor Lady Woolston lay unconscious, as before. But Messrs. Henderson and Hall, having attended the ceremony and deposited in the hands of Sir John Wraysbury the will alluded to by Harpsden, his two daughters and the husband of the absent Caroline were summoned to be present at the reading, in all the solemnity of their crape and bombazine. The new baronet was eager to get through the business. He wished to be alone with his wife ; or rather to unite with her in contrite and careful attendance upon the mother whose hours were numbered. As to the will, how could it personally concern him ? The estate was now his own. All the rest would naturally be bequeathed to his sisters.

He only hoped that his poor father might not have been tempted, in a moment of anger, to inscribe some bitter sentence against him, in a document that must perforce be made public. For even Sir John Woolston Wraysbury, Bart., with seventy thousand a year, was not proof against the animadversions of the world.

But on this head, he was speedily reassured. The will of Sir Harry had been executed in his own boyhood ; immediately after lodgment of the sum of money to pay off the incumbrance on the Harrals estate, for the benefit of his younger children.

At that period, his personality had probably amounted to no very considerable sum ; for the whole was bequeathed in a very few words to his wife, Dame Janetta Woolston, who, as she already possessed, “ by virtue of her marriage settlement, the power of appointment over her own fortune of fifty thousand pounds,” said the testator, “ will be pleased to dispose of this further legacy, in favour of one or other of our

children, or to be equally divided between them."

"A most equitable distribution," observed Sir John Wraysbury, when, having finished his recitation of the will, the solicitor appeared to glance towards him for his opinion, as he laid it on the table and deliberately replaced his spectacles in their case.

"Equitable, certainly," was Mr. Henderson's reply. "Yet I am inclined to fancy, Sir John, that my late respected client contemplated some ulterior arrangement. For in the course of the seventeen years which have elapsed since this will was made, the value of his personality has been increased, by economy and a few successful speculations, from five or six thousand pounds to nearly eighty."

At this intimation, neither his daughter nor his son-in-law could restrain a start, or change of colour.

"So that, with the original sum in settlement, my poor mother holds at her disposal about one hundred and thirty thousand pounds?"

inquired Sir John, pleased that so handsome a provision should fall to the share of his sisters.

"*Held* at her disposal," emended the family solicitor. "I say *held*, sir, because, in her ladyship's condition of mind and body, she is utterly incompetent to alter the dispositions of a will which, at her desire, my partner and self drew up for her on occasion of your marriage."

"Of my marriage?" reiterated Sir John, in much surprise, vexed to find that, though he had escaped reproof at the hands of his father, the milder Lady Woolston had judged it necessary to place on record her displeasure.

"Finding it probable that the resentment of Sir Harry might for years restrict to very narrow limits the income of her son," continued Mr. Henderson, addressing the whole family party, "her ladyship considered it her duty to assign to him, without reserve, the whole of her property, either then in enjoyment, or to accrue at any future time."

"But Lady Woolston could not then con-

template the enormous addition to her fortune made to her by the will of Sir Harry ?” faltered Harpsden, turning as pale as his white cravat.

“ Certainly not,” calmly rejoined his brother-in-law; “ nor the fine property to which I have in the interim succeeded.”

“ But you are of course at liberty to decline the legacy, or at my poor mother’s death, to refuse to administer,” said Emma, amid all her consternation preserving a truly Woolstonian eye to her interests.

“ Pardon me, madam,” interrupted the solicitor. “ Sir John has no voice in the matter. The assigns of her ladyship’s deceased trustees, myself and my partner, are appointed executors to her will; and as it directs that at the death of her only son the property shall be divided among the children of his marriage with Miss Pennington, he has only a life interest in it.—Sir John cannot move a step in the business.”

“ Then I call it a most iniquitous job !”—cried Harpsden, half choked with astonishment and

indignation. And though Emma and Clara were too well-bred to indulge in such direct accusations and vociferous tones, in that house whose business for a fortnight past had been transacted in whispers, their opinions were probably coincident with those of their clerical brother-in-law.

The man with the old head on young shoulders,—though his head was somewhat younger and his shoulders a great deal older than when he earned the designation,—kept his temper. From which, the Reverend William Harpsden inferred that he also meant to keep the money.

“It will be as well to moderate your expressions, Harpsden,” mildly observed Sir John, “till we have ascertained that the property is as considerable as Mr. Henderson at present believes; and that my poor mother has made no revocation of her bequest since my accession of fortune.” Which latter suggestion appeared so much within the scope of probability, that the mercury rose as by a sun-stroke in the veins of Harpsden and his sisters-in-law.

"Certainly, certainly," they unanimously exclaimed; "nothing so likely as that Lady Woolston should have made a later will."

Mr. Henderson shook his head. He knew how much effort it had cost the meek-spirited or rather weak-spirited woman only to sign the one he had drawn up under her instructions. That with her own brains she should have concocted and with her own hand written another, was much as if the faint-footed Emma had talked of ascending Mont Blanc.

"Nor are we certain that it is yet too late for the cruel circumstances of the case to be laid before her," said Harpsden, endeavouring to swallow his rising choler. "Dr. Fermor pronounced yesterday that her Ladyship was a shade better;—that there were slight indications of returning consciousness."

"An effort of nature may, even to the last, be hoped for," added Clara, who was a general dealer in plausibilities.

"And why not an effort of art?" retorted

Harpsden, briskly. "I have thought from her first seizure; that the medical men were strangely supine." Yet none of those present could bring to mind that he had previously made such a suggestion. "No case is so hopeless that medical science should relax in its endeavours. *Nux vomica* has not been tried; which is often used at the Union to stir the torpid muscles and faculties of aged and paralytic patients. Among the higher classes, galvanism has been found of even greater efficacy."

The young head on middle-aged shoulders could bear this no longer. "In one word, Harpsden," said he, "I am convinced that my two sisters here present, and even poor Carry, your wife, have confidence in my honour and principles. I am not a money-thirsting man, as the nature of my marriage must have shown you; and you consequently cannot attribute to interested motives what I am about to say. But by heavens, sir! I will not have the last days of my poor harmless mother disturbed by experiments, in hopes that

a new signature may be extorted from her hand. You yourself informed me, on my arrival, that her mind was totally gone; that her life could scarcely be called existence; that the doctors announced their art to be unavailable. It would do little credit to any of us to torture her, at the eleventh hour, for mercenary purposes."

The Reverend William evidently thought otherwise. A moment afterwards, he hastily quitted the library, as if no longer able to endure the company of a man who had robbed him and his family of the third of one hundred and thirty thousand pounds; but, in reality, to dispatch a fresh express to London for the attendance of a celebrated mesmeric practitioner, to whom the Zoist attributes the miracle of having occasionally restored the dead to life.

Perhaps the mere inditing of his mystic name under her roof, may have had some influence over the mind of the comatose patient. For that very evening, her children were startled from the tea-table by the astonishing intelligence that

Lady Woolston had not only moved her head upon her pillow, but pronounced several unconnected words; on the strength of which, Mr. Harpsden was fetched from the parsonage to participate in their joy at symptoms so favourable.

But poor Carry, to whom they were imparted, discerned, with the instinct of an invalid, that the seeming rekindling of the vital spark was merely the fleckering of the expiring lamp.

“Remember, my dear William,” said she, to her husband, as he was quitting the room, “that when poor old Wardlaw died last year, after many days of seeming insensibility, he recovered sufficient consciousness to summon his grandchildren; but only to expire in the act of giving them his blessing.”

Her husband heard, or heeded, not!—Already, he was at the foot of the stairs, on his way to Harrals; secretly of opinion that if his mother-in-law should recover sufficient consciousness to take leave of her children and expire after the

act of dividing her property among her daughters, she would have accomplished her last duties even better than old Wardlaw.

But this was not to be. Lady Woolston never came fully to herself. The utmost demonstration of her lucidity of intellect consisted in endeavouring to raise to her blanched lips the hand of her son, on whom her glazed eyes were fixed with tender recognition; muttering at the same time certain words which he could only interpret into,—“By your father,—beside my husband!”—as if in reference to the grave towards which she was hastening.—

Before the breathless Rector made his appearance, all was over, and his brother-in-law was escorting Emma and Clara from the room. They did not again issue from their own; and Harpsden could find no other auditors than the London solicitors, for his angry complaints that, for many years past, he had been shamefully deceived, and abominably trifled with.

"To those old people," said he, "I have been more a servant than a son-in-law."

"At your own instance, sir, or at theirs?" drily inquired the formal Mr. Henderson.

"From a sense of duty towards my family," he replied, gaspingly; "who, I believed, would reap the fruits of my devotedness."

"I understood, sir, that, only two years ago, Sir Harry presented you with the living of Harrals, for which he previously refused, through myself, a sum of four thousand eight hundred pounds?" persisted Mr. Henderson, still more stiffly than before.

"And what then?—That he might settle me close at his park gates, and command my time as though it were his own."

"An appropriation which might have been as easily effected, sir, had he simply allowed you to retain the curacy that first introduced you to his notice, and an acquaintance with the Woolston family," replied the solicitor, in an authoritative tone.

“ Since that period, Mr. Henderson, nine years have elapsed,” retorted the angry Rector ; “ and by my union with his daughter——”

“ You became intitled to the fortune secured to her by the marriage settlements of her parents ; —a sum of eight thousand three hundred and thirty-three pounds and a fraction, which, nine years ago, (as you justly observe), I had the honour to pay to your trustees. What further pretensions you may have formed, Mr. Harpsden, must have been purely speculative ; and you must pardon me for adding, that your conduct in attacking Sir John Wraysbury in his own house, and with the body of his mother lying unburied, will recommend you as little to the good-will of your opulent brother-in-law, as to public approbation.”

Mr. Harpsden, who had been standing, hat in hand, as if on the eve of departure, now clapped it fiercely on his head.

“ Whether as a Christian or a man of the world, I have no lessons to receive at the hands

of Messrs. Henderson and Hall," was his bitter rejoinder.—“When I have conferred with my brothers-in-law and fellow-sufferers, Molyneux and Wroughton, I shall be better prepared with a professional answer for the solicitors of Sir John Wraysbury.”

CHAPTER XI.

THAT the last days of Sir Harry Woolston had been brought to a sudden end, by learning that the wide sea divided him from the son towards whom his heart had long been yearning, and from whom he was hourly expecting to receive overtures of conciliation and peace, can no more be doubted, than that, as in proportion the old man's feelings warmed towards the exiled John, the kindly glow had been quenched by cold water thrown upon it by Harpsden.— But all was now over. He was at rest. The struggle of life now remained with Sir John. Let

us hope that the slumbers of the proud old baronet were not disturbed in his leaden coffin, by the knowledge that the same suit of sables, the same black liveries, assumed for the Liverpool merchant, served also as a token of respect to Sir Harry Woolston, of Harrals.

It was a sad persecution, meanwhile, to Mrs. Molyneux, that, on her return to the Castle, though her husband's family appeared to be prepared with the utmost sympathy for the filial sorrow she found it so difficult to assume, no one would enter into her resentments. Lady Dinton quietly reminded her how much she had neglected her parents; and that, had she seen more of her father, he would have become attached to her children, and probably altered his will.—As to Sir John Wraysbury, as he had clearly done, said, and written nothing to suggest his mother's disposal of her property, the disappointed Emma's indignation appeared to be as groundless as it was injudicious.

Though Lord and Lady Dinton were not al-

lowed to hear half the ill-language vented by their son, on his return from his sporting tour, they would not tolerate, on the part of Mrs. Molyneux, any harsh expression, which, in their opinion, not only sinned against the mourning garb worn for a father and mother, but afforded “so bad an example.”—Lady Dinton, herself the most dutiful of wives, regarded the death of Lady Woolston as one of the finest instances of conjugal devotion since the martyrdom of Arria, recorded in Enfield’s Speaker ; — one of the few English classics with which her Ladyship’s unsophisticated school-room rendered her familiar.

At Denny Cross, the subject was treated with similar reverence. Though Sir John Wraysbury was of opinion, like the “divine Clarissa,” that his excellent female parent would have done more good in her generation, by showing a little less submission as a wife, and a little more spirit as a mother, he treated her memory with as much tenderness and his father’s with as much respect, as though all the virtues had been their

portion usually attributed to country baronets on the fancy monuments that crown their family pews ; and Denny Cross, in spite of the contumely with which it had been treated by the Woolstons during their lifetime, treated with due solemnity their death.—The old squire was not the man to speak otherwise than respectfully of parents in presence of their children.

Nor had the deportment of the Penningtons varied by a single shade towards the Wraysburys, since their wooden ladle became a gold apostle spoon.—What difference could the weedy villa, or Harrals, or the palace of which Sir John was already contemplating the erection, make in their feelings towards Maria, or their dear little Netta ?—

They did not so much as perceive that Wraysbury himself was becoming a little altered ;—not purse-proud,—not proud of his position in the county ;—but self-absorbed, and more than a little harassed by the cares of wealth.

For the wise one who of old, framed the exhortation, “soul, take thine ease,” was probably aware, by experience, that the ease of great men is seldom easy to take; nay, that souls able to command the enjoyments of this world, have almost more occasion for exhortation to enjoy themselves, than the Lazarus at their gates.

Sir John Woolston Wraysbury, for example, might truly be called a favourite of fortune. No man of his time, perhaps, afforded a finer example of the partiality of the blind goddess.—And he had the more reason to luxuriate in his wealth that it had come without the smallest effort or self-compromise.—If he had done nothing to deserve, he had at least done nothing to secure it.

Yet such is the gracelessness of human nature, that, in the secrecy of his heart,—(that darker chamber, that iron safe, where people deposit their deeds and sentiments, as they deposit their worldly pelf in the fire-proof chests

of Chubb,)—the new millionaire had many grievances to enumerate.

In the first place, the enormous bequest of old Adam, and the rich legacy of his parents, were alike burthened with what he regarded as a ridiculous condition.—That lands inherited from sire to son since the Norman Conquest, should be tied up by entail, might be reasonable enough; otherwise, as in the case of the Penningtons, an ancient family would be peeled away into nothingness, by the spoliations of succeeding generations. But money,—money amassed by trade, which would increase and multiply like thistles, if the seed were dispersed by the power of taking wing,—ought not to be thus shackled. If judiciously invested, for instance, in the United States, who could even surmise the eventual profit of such a fortune? Yet so hampered was he by that foolish will, that the principal was out of his own control, either for purposes of emolument or of generosity!—

Again, his father and mother, though aware that Harrals would require an outlay of forty or fifty thousand pounds to place the house and estate in tolerable order, had tied up their money for the benefit of children they had never seen, or chosen to see, or who might never exist;—and, under such circumstances, he scarcely felt himself master of his magnificent fortunes.

Whatever business he attempted to transact, he ran his head against the stone-wall of legal interdiction.—Not that he would have felt bound, under any circumstances, to adopt the suggestions of the Rector of Harrals, and abdicate his right to Lady Woolston's property in favour of his sisters, whose interests he had at his marriage so conscientiously respected, and who, in return, had coldly confirmed his sentence of ostracism. But willingly would he have held the money at his absolute disposal.—

Important as the golden dross had appeared in his eyes when dunne by his coal-merchant, it was, in fact, acquiring six times the importance

in his estimation, now that he was rich enough to purchase a coal-mine.

“And have you really resolved then, dear Maria, to abandon Harrals, and to shut up the old house?”—inquired Sophy Pennington, (whose simplicity of character often prompted her to ask questions which deeper-thoughted persons dare not venture,) when the new Baronet and his wife arrived at Denny Cross to claim their little girl.

“If you were to see the place, you would scarcely wonder,” replied Lady Wraysbury. “Such a ruin!—such a desart!—Nothing that was not absolutely indispensable to render it weather-tight, has been done for the last twenty years.”—

“Still, now that John is so well able to place it in repair—”

“It is not worth repairing;—the only thing to be done, is to throw it down and build a new one.”

“Which you could well afford to do.”

"But unless we should ever have a son," persisted Maria, "to what purpose?—Harrals is entailed, you know, on male heirs only."—

"Is it?—I never asked. I never heard the question discussed."

"Yes! If dear John were to die to-morrow, the Wiltshire Woolstons would inherit."

"How vexatious!" said Sophy, thinking only of little Netta,—who was busy with her doll in a corner of the room.

"Not altogether," rejoined Maria, who by close contact with the Woolstons was becoming a little more worldly-wise than the rest of her family. "For unless the entail had existed, John, at the time of our marriage, would certainly have been disinherited by Sir Harry."

"Yes,—I remember now," replied Miss Pennington, "that, when he refused his consent, the entail was pleaded to my father, to prove that his opposition was not of vital importance."

"So that it would be absurd indeed to expend a vast sum of money in building on the

estate, unless certain that it would descend to a child of our own," pleaded Maria.

"It certainly seems so. But yet, that fine old family seat!" argued her sister, who, in her rare visits to Northampton, had from the road so often admired, over the ill-repaired park palings of Harrals, its massive oaks and feathery beech-trees.

"The place does not gain by being viewed closer," said Maria, who remembered having shared the same partiality. "You can conceive nothing more desolate than the wind howling in the quadrangle of the crumbling old brick-house, with its grove of scraggy Scotch firs. Every thing at Harrals is old, without being venerable. The rooms look so shabby, and smell so musty; and the huge bedsteads and small three-cornered washhand-stands are so comfortless. Denny Cross is twice as enjoyable."

"Not more enjoyable than Harrals might easily be made."

"And then, it would be so disagreeable to

John to be in perpetual collision with Mr. Harpsden!"

"His brother-in-law?"

"Now Rector of Harrals,—with whom he is on the most unpleasant terms."

"But John is fond of his sister?"—

"That is the worst part of it. Mrs. Harpsden was always his favourite; and it would give him pain to live so near her, yet never see her; particularly as she is a great sufferer."

"But if really attached to her, he would surely make the sacrifice of reconciling himself to her husband?"

"The Woolston family do not appear ready at reconciliations. But in this case, it would be useless; for Mr. Harpsden's habits and opinions are so totally opposite to my husband's, that John and he could never live on terms of amity."

Sophia sighed. She was thankful that, in the garden at Denny Cross, such *very* prickly plants were not indigenous.

"In short," said she, after a short reverie, "you have taken leave for ever of the house of which you once thought so much, and to which you are never to return!"—

"Not unless it should please God to give us a son."

"Of which, before long, there is every probability," said Sophy, more cheerfully. "So that I shall still live in hopes of hearing the rooks caw in the old pine-trees. But how anxious,—how *very* anxious,—John must feel to have a boy!"

"Very.—But far more so to be certain of a second. For if Netta were to inherit the Wraysbury property, which she must do if we have only a single son,—"

"*What* am I to do, mamma?" inquired the little girl, whose ear was caught by the sound of her own name, as she sat dressing her doll.

"*Nothing*, my dear," replied Lady Wraysbury (after the fashion of so many mothers, who, by their perpetual hushings, seem to wish

that their children had been born dumb ; as well as by their incessant indiscretion, to suppose that that they were born deaf).—"He thinks," she continued, lowering her voice, but not so much as to escape the quick ear of Janetta,—"that it would be hard for a Woolston of Harrals to be looked down upon by his sister."

"How can he even fancy such a thing!" cried Sophy, her colour rising at the suggestion. "As if sisterly and brotherly love could be influenced by the possession of a few thousands more or less!"

"But even if the heiress showed no consciousness of the distance between their fortunes, the world would be less generous."

"The world—the world!"—

"Those who live in it, know that its verdicts must not be under-valued."

"Certainly not,—on questions of morality. But as regards attentions and hospitalities, the shade of difference likely to be shown to a girl with seventy thousand a year in prospect, or a

young man with only eight, is surely not worth thinking of."

"I quite agree with you. But John does not ;—and the son, should he ever make his appearance, will perhaps be of his father's opinion."

"But I should like to have a brother, mamma," cried Netta, now throwing down her doll, and resolutely joining the party. "I should like to have a great many brothers.—Why mayn't I have a great many brothers?"

"The more the merrier, darling," said her aunt, taking the child fondly on her knee. "And you would love them all very much, wouldn't you, Netta?"

"Yes—as dearly as you and mamma and aunt Bessy love uncle Hugh and uncle John."—It would have been hard to find a stronger standard of comparison !

"But if Harrals is to be shut up," observed Sophia, in order to close the delicate chapter of fraternity—"what is to become of you ?—The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have

nests ;—but Woolston of Harrals, since he became Woolston Wraysbury, seems to be without a roof to his head !”

“ John has taken, for the present, a house in Carlton Gardens. He has still a world of business to get through. Though London is so cheerless in November, I am afraid we must spend the winter in town.”

“ Then why not leave this child at Denny Cross ?” said Miss Pennington, accelerating the gentle trot upon her knee she was giving to the future heiress.

“ No, no. Come with us to London, aunt Sophy,” cried Netta, turning round to seal her petition with a kiss. “ I love you dearly,—but I don’t want to be away from papa and mamma.”—

“ My husband and I were going to make the same request,” added Lady Wraysbury. “ Indeed, you owe yourself to us, Sophy. To please my father, we renounced our claim for the journey to Marienbad.”

But Sophia steadily declined the proposal. Not only because she considered that although he possessed a younger daughter peculiarly devoted to him, her place in life was by the fireside of her father ; but because she was beginning to feel a little shy of those who seemed to think that even kindred blood could be warmed or chilled by fluctuations of fortune.

"I have been so little at Denny Cross of late," said she, "that I must spend the winter with my father and Bessy. When you were in sickness and sorrow, and needed my services, I did not mind leaving them. It is different now."

"Different as regards sickness and sorrow,—not as regards need of your company," replied Lady Wraysbury, with tears gathering in her eyes.

"Yes—indeed, *indeed* we want your company, aunt Sophy !" added the little girl.—" You are so kind and comfortable. You are never cross or hasty. You put every thing to rights,—you keep everything in order.—And yet, everybody loves you."

Miss Pennington silenced her by a kiss. But her sister was scarcely discerning enough to perceive that the child had become already unconsciously conscious of her father's infirmities of temper, and her mother's languid indolence.

"The boy we are looking for, may perhaps arrive early in the spring, or a little sister for Netta in his place," said Lady Wraysbury, not a little mortified at her sister's refusal. "And John does not think me quite strong enough just now to dispense with a governess. If you were with us, he would not be so much afraid of Netta being too much in the nursery with old Nancy, or a fatigue to me. I tremble at the idea of that Miss Avesford.—Do, dearest Sophy, *do* secure me from the annoyance of a governess in the house, if only for a few months longer.—With a baby in my arms, I may perhaps less miss the company of this naughty girl!"

Instead of resenting the quiet selfishness which thus disposed of her time, and disregarded her inclination, Sophy in the end conceded

to the entreaties and endearments of her sister and niece ;—and the squire was left once more to the gentle devotion of his dear Bessy.

A few days afterwards, the Wraysburys were settled in a magnificent mansion in Carlton Gardens, which some short-sighted epicurean had amused and ruined himself in furnishing, as if for the express purpose of ministering to the comfort of the new Croesus.

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN WOOLSTON had often complained in the miserable days so largely absorbed in vibrating per bus between Hendon and the Temple, that "he never had a moment to himself;"—a common murmur on the part of men of business. But the Sir John Woolston Wraysbury, who had obtained the royal consent to append the latter name to his patronymic, even though the honourable designation of "Sir" and "Bart." were prefixed and affixed to the W. W., grumbled much after the same fashion.—

He had now, however, to pay for his interviews with lawyers, instead of receiving payment; and his levees in Carlton Gardens, frequented by agents and purveyors of all sorts and descriptions, by whom scarcely a single object was forwarded, or provided, which his own inclinations prompted him to appropriate, were almost as vexatious as his old mornings at the Temple, where the fidgety clerk was chiefly occupied in staving off unwelcome intruders.— His correspondence with the Heralds' College touching his change of name, and with the Inland Revenue Commissioners touching the amount of his legacy duty, on the Wraysbury and Lady Woolston's estate, though transacted by his solicitors, were carefully supervised by himself. Then, the widely extensive nature of the securities amassed by old Adam,—the mortgages to be called in,—the foreign bills and bonds to be investigated,—filled his hands with business. The picture-dealers, to whose scrutiny he had consigned the old man's collection to be valued for

probate duty, came with their criticisms ; assuring him that paintings which had cost thousands to his whimsical predecessor were copies, and worthless ; while others, bought for a trifle, were invaluable. On finding that for a hideous little mutilated statue, purchased by the foreign delegate of Adam Wraysbury at the sale of a crowned head, (known to contain under its Crown as much knowledge of the Fine Arts as would have crushed Dr. Waagen), would be welcome to the British Museum, in exchange for its weight in silver, he began to take some interest in the objects classed in the legacy-duty schedule, as “furniture and objects of art.”—Drawers full of cameos and intaglios, intermixed with bits of malachite or strings of coral,—bags, in which the rarest coins of the dead mintages, (if Latin and Greek monies may thus be designated,) lay jumbled with Irish half-pence, and farthings with lucky holes in them,—were submitted to a careful scrutiny ; and on one occasion, while rummaging a heap

of obsolete account-books, he was rewarded by discovering an oak-bound Codex Argenteus, well-qualified to make the hearts of Panizzi, or the learned Dons of the Bodleian, sing for joy.

But the detection of these treasures, so loosely guarded, only seemed to worry him, by inspiring the notion that others of equal value might have been abstracted without exciting the notice of the deceased proprietor, or his own suspicions. Having heard of colossal fortunes made during the Wellington wars, by the mere cabbaging of journeymen employed by army clothiers, he began to fancy that the underlings of old Adam's office and household must have grown rich by picking up the scraps of his untold treasures.

By such anxieties, his peace had never been ruffled at the weedy villa. He began to see that the even hand of Providence, which forbids that "fortune ever come with both hands full," was supplying a succedaneum to the coal-merchant's bill!—

"You were overhasty, John, in sanctioning the sale of the house at Liverpool," said Farmer, the first time he consented to share a family dinner in Carlton Gardens. "It was a quaint old den. If you would have commissioned me, I should have dearly liked to overlook its incongruities before the Goths and Vandals laid hands upon it."

"I am sorry you never proposed it," replied his host. "In my cursory view, I probably under-rated its importance; and I intended to visit it again, before a sale took place. But my unlucky excursion to the continent, followed by the melancholy events at Harrals, diverted my attention. So that, when, soon after my poor mother's death, Wortham and Stock apprised me that a very liberal offer had been made for the premises, I authorised a sale; premising only that the pictures, statues, and books should be reserved and dispatched to town."

"That is, as many of the books, statues, and pictures, as they thought proper to leave you!—

And thus, the family-mansion of the Wraysburys, (for, after all, John, 'twas as much their family mansion as Northumberland House is that of the Percies,) has come to be dismembered :—one half being let, I find, to a Joint Stock Banking Company,—the other, to a beer-shop.”

“ The deuce it is!—I understood from Worthingham that it was to be the residence of some mercantile firm.”

“ You understood?—I daresay you never inquired!—But I trust the *manes* of my friend old Adam will be easier to appease than the wrath of his kinsmen and fellow-townersmen; who seem to think that, having found such a mine of wealth within the old house, it ought to have been as sacred in your sight as the Santissima Casa of Loretto.”

“ My dear Farmer, I have renounced the task of endeavouring to (what footmen call) give satisfaction. My Northamptonshire neighbours are furious because I do not choose to live in a

Castle Rackrent, where the rats would have the advantage of me ; or build in its place a palace, for the future benefit of a fiftieth cousin.—Liverpool is of opinion, you say, that I ought to make a gnat in amber of my great-grandfather's counting-house !—Even Hendon, doubtless, denounces me as a graceless truant. But, as the song says, ‘ Let them rave.’ All this outcry only attaches me the more to Carlton Gardens : particularly when you can be persuaded to exchange your favourite arm-chair and pursuits for a place by my fireside.”

Roger Farmer signified, though more by countenance than words, that the fire-side was far from distasteful to him. But he could not help observing—“ Yet how are we to reconcile this strong attachment to Carlton Gardens, with the purchase you are meditating in Dorsetshire ?”—

Sir John Wraysbury gave a start which caused his coffee-cup to overflow.

“ You were laughing at me just now, Far-

mer," said he, "for having to sign myself 'W. W.!'—But you ought to append the same initials to your own name,—as Wizard and Warlock.—I never mentioned this intended purchase to mortal breathing."

"Not even to *me!*!" interposed Maria, "which I resent as a breach of conjugal privilege."

But while she remonstrated with such loving eyes and so sweet a smile, even Roger Farmer felt that petticoat government could not be very irksome, where, as in the present case, the petticoat was of woven lambswool.

"I was in hopes of affording to my wife an agreeable surprise, when my purchase was complete," said Sir John, glancing reproachfully at the blabbing old bachelor.

"I bow to your rebuke, my dear fellow," replied Farmer, suiting the action to the word; "but though I have often heard that there were secrets in all families, I fancied yours was exempt."

"I will forgive you at once," rejoined his friend, "if you will only tell me, in return, how you made the discovery."

"In the simplest manner. I was at Dovetail, the conveyancer's, this morning, on business of my own; which he could not attend to, because he was poring over the title-deeds of Lynchcombe, on which he said he had an opinion to give by Thursday next. Knowing that the property had been in the Latimer family ever since the Lord Harry filched it from the church, I felt somewhat curious concerning the intended purchaser."

"But my solicitors expressly conditioned that my name should not be mentioned?"

"Nor was it. It was *that* betrayed you. He told me he was not at liberty to disclose the name of his client; a gentleman who, having recently inherited an enormous fortune, imagined that the price would be raised upon him if his name were quoted in the market."

"Well?"—demanded Sir John, a little impatiently.

"Very little more!" added Roger Farmer, with a knowing smile. "'Wraysbury, for a thousand!' I exclaimed, when he had made this explanation. And I saw, by the biting of Dovetail's lips, that I had hit the bull's-eye."

"I have not often been accused of over-prudence," said Sir John, *not* a little nettled.—

"Nobody accuses any body of any thing, now-a-days, unless by a letter to the newspaper under a false signature," returned Farmer, gaily. "But I have often suspected that you owe the squareness of your well-curled crop to an over-development of the organs of caution,—a fault on the right side, my dear John. Because, with the utmost of our care, the best-kept secret usually becomes public at a month's end! Even the mysteries of the cabinet ooze out,—even secret committees find an echo."

"But the authorship of Junius, and of the

Icon Basilike, Mr. Farmer?"—pleaded Sophy, in a gentle voice.

Roger Farmer stared. He had not suspected the habitually silent young lady of Denny Cross of caring for any other authorship than that of a washing-bill or recipe-book.

" You are a scholar, then, Miss Pennington?" said he, with almost contemptuous surprise.

" Scarcely a better one than my little niece; but I have heard my Cambridge brother discuss the question.—If, however, you wish to reduce me to humbler ground, tell me who invented railways, or who murdered Eliza Grimwood?"

" Or who exacted of Napoleon the execution of the Duc d'Enghien,—or who beheaded Charles the First,"—added Sir J. W. W.

" Even in private families," said Lady Wraysbury, " what innumerable mysteries are maintained!"

" To go no further than my own," added her husband,—"(as we are almost a family circle, I may venture to allude to the subject). There is

my brother in-law, Wroughton, as great a social enigma as the Man in the Iron Mask.—He has been eight years Clara's husband ; and I know no more of his fortune or origin than my father did when, on the mere strength of an introduction from Gerald Molyneux, and chiefly to relieve my mother from the cares of chaperonship, he gave him his daughter.”

“ But to Sir Harry he must have explained his parentage ?”

“ He stated that he was from the north—a wide word ;—and that his father and mother died when he was very young, leaving him to the care of an uncle, who was also dead. He had some property in the French funds, which, with her own fortune, he proposed to settle on Clara.”

“ But all this is lucid enough ?”—

“ If his *ipse dixit* sufficed. But some people declare that he is an illegitimate son of the late king ;—others, that his real father was hung for forgery ;—and certain it is that, at the last moment, nothing tangible was forthcoming for in-

vestment but Clara's eight thousand three hundred pounds."

" Yet they appear to be very well off ?" observed Lady Wraysbury. " We found them in the best apartments of the best hotel at Homburg ; and I am assured that, during the winter, they give the best dinners in Frankfort."

" Which is exactly what constitutes the mystery of the case. Molyneux, by whom he was introduced to Clara when she was travelling with Emma on the continent, knows no more of his history than we do.—He first met him at Baden, as we saw him the other day at Homburg, the best-dressed and best-mannered Englishman in the place ;—quiet, unobtrusive, knowing every one, and an honorary member of the best club of almost every capital in Europe ;—never appearing to have much money at his disposal, but never in want of it."

" Without o'erflowing, full," said Farmer, in conclusion.

" If he were a Russian," added Sir John, " we

should conclude him to be a spy. But an English *mouchard* is as apocryphal in natural history as the monsters of heraldic science."

"A blackleg is the nearest interpretation."

"But he does not answer to the name. There is nothing flash about Wroughton. He is well-educated and well-bred."

"An embodied mystery, certainly. But if his wife be happy with him, his antecedents do not much concern you."

"Pardon me. Before I make a friend and companion of him, I must obtain a key to the cipher."

"I fancied that Mrs. Wroughton accompanied you home from Germany? Could *she* afford you no information?"

"I was too much engrossed by anxiety concerning my father and mother, even to seek it. We were sitting down to dinner for the first time with the Wroughtons, actually taking our first glass of wine together since their marriage, when I was called away from table to receive

that terrible dispatch from the hands of Baron Rothschild's clerk."

"An ill omen, certainly."

"And now that I have thought over Wroughton's singular mode of existence, I have begun to fear that my sister's reserve may proceed from domestic uneasiness. Mrs. Wroughton no more resembles the gay, cheerful Clara Woolston——"

"Than Sir John Woolston Wraysbury resembles my pains-taking pupil," rejoined old Farmer. "My dear fellow, time and tide suffice to work the strangest transformations!—No man, quoth the proverb, differs so much from another, as the same man from himself, at a former period of life; a trite saying, which my experience fully confirms. I, for instance, am no longer the working bee of Lincoln's Inn. In time, my dear John, I may ask you to put me up at Boodle's."

"I should as soon think of putting up your banns in church!"—said Wraysbury, laughing. "But married or single, you are a pleasanter

riddle to read than Wroughton, of whom I always dread to learn that he originally sprang out of a crucible, or that he has evaporated, leaving only a whiff of brimstone behind."

Both his wife and guest discerned so clearly, in this sudden outbreak against Wroughton, a desire on the part of Sir John to divert their attention from Lynchcombe, that they did not again advert to the subject. But though acquiescent, Maria was not pleased. She felt that, at the weedy villa, her wishes would have been consulted in the choice of a new abode.

"But why surprised?" said Sophy, when made the confidante of her vexation; "is it not as old as Adam, that when men cease to be our slaves, they begin to be our masters?"

"John had always a will of his own," rejoined her sister, mournfully. "He proved it to Sir Harry Woolston, by his marriage."

"On which occasion, you found no fault with him!" said Sophy, cheerfully. "So take my advice, dearest sister; adopt, as far as you can,

and on all occasions, that said will of his own
and the grand mansion at Lynchcombe will be
always as full of love and sunshine, as the hum-
ble one at Maple Hill!"—

CHAPTER XIII.

It was probably because he held it a highly critical matter to decide upon a residence for himself and his posterity, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds, that Sir John had not augmented his puzzlement by taking counsel with his wife ; whose endowments of head were far less valuable than those of heart.—The step was nearly as vital to his comfort as that of matrimony itself ; and since in marrying he had consulted no inclinations save those of John Woolston, he assigned the same authority on the present occasion to those of Sir John Wraysbury.—

When a poor bus-haunting lawyer of thirty-one, he had looked on life, as a prodigal on his purse, as a thing that was to last for ever. But now that the sands in his hour-glass were of gold-dust, he counted every grain with penurious care.

"I have now attained," thought he, "half the allotted age of man ; and cannot afford to trifle with what remains. The Government Commission spent half-a-dozen years in finding a residence for the Duke of Wellington. *I* must find one promptly, and set the bricklayers to work. My crotchetts about household comfort can only be gratified by building. In London, one has no elbow-room for whims and fancies. But a ready-made house in the country would be like a condemned cell."—

And lo ! just as the passion for brick and mortar was strongest upon him, Lynchcombe appeared in the market ; a family estate to which, for a century past, a decayed family had been unable to render justice. As in the case of

most great estates, the house was not so much as reckoned in the bargain ; so that even the prudent millionaire might feel justified in throwing it down.—He resolved, however, to build on the same site. He could not choose better.—A noble down, partly clothed with timber, sheltered it from the north-wind ; while the façade commanded a fertile valley with peeps of the sea, at two miles' distance ;—far enough off to escape the monotonous sound of the waves ; near enough to adorn the landscape with inlayings of silver, sapphire or lapis lazuli.

Before the winter was over, the purchase was complete ; and by the time the crocuses started up through the sooty soil of Carlton Gardens, the plans of a renowned architect had been carefully corrected and retouched by Sir John. A contract with first-rate builders was speedily signed ; and a magnificent tinted drawing prepared to figure in the architectural room of the Royal Academy Exhibition, purporting to be the “South front of a mansion in process

of erection at Lynchcombe, Dorset, for Sir John Woolston Wraysbury, Bart."—

And yet, his wife had never seen the spot!— Having prudently adopted her sister Sophia's philosophy, she refrained from thwarting him by questions or objections; and by the time all the above preliminaries were adjusted, the time was so near at hand that was to decide the question of heir or no heir, that a journey into Dorsetshire simply to gratify her curiosity, would have been highly imprudent.

One only person, indeed, ever attempted to stimulate her interest in the subject. Roger Farmer, who, like other shy men, having once broken the ice of his reserve towards the family of his former pupil, seemed to find the luxurious yet tranquil life of Carlton Gardens completely to his taste, often lounged in, as a privileged friend, and occasionally ventured to reproach Lady Wraysbury for not taking a more active part in the pursuits of her husband. With an old bachelor's blindness or indifference to the

requirements of her position, he wanted her to hurry down into Dorsetshire and decide for herself whether the ancient mansion of the Latimers were not tenantable, and whether the atmosphere and aspect suited her fancy, before eighty or a hundred thousand pounds were expended in creating a palace on the spot.

Again and again did he remonstrate with her supineness ; till at length, perceiving that her sister was harassed by his interference, Sophy Pennington remonstrated in her turn.

“ Depend upon it, Mr. Farmer,” said she, “ interference between married people is almost always injurious.—When really attached, as is the case with Maria and her husband, they understand each other’s mutual claims better than any other person can define them. My sister is happier in making her husband’s will her law, than if enacting laws of her own.”

The dry old lawyer stared at her in silent amazement.—He had seldom been subjected to a rebuke ; and here was a young woman,—an

ignorant,—a mere rustic,—who presumed to give him a lesson!—

“ You have affronted him,” said Lady Wraysbury, anxiously, when, soon afterwards, he took his hat and his departure. “ He will never come here again; and John will be terribly annoyed.”

“ John would be far more annoyed if, by his officious advice, Mr. Farmer managed to sow dissension between you,” persisted Sophy.

“ *That* I defy him to do. But he has as little the inclination as the power. He wishes us well. Only he cannot forget that dear John was once his pupil; or bear in mind that he is twenty years younger than himself.”

“ Not *twenty*,—only fifteen,—” said Miss Pennington. And if her sister had not been wholly engrossed by thoughts of her absent husband and coming baby, she would perhaps have felt some surprise that Sophy should have made so exact a calculation.

Miss Pennington’s prediction that, in spite of

the lecture he had received, the old bachelor would not fail to return, was speedily verified. His visits to the house had become habitual to him.—He had appropriated to himself a chair by the fireside, commanding a cheerful view of the park, in which he sat quietly caressing his favourite leg, and answering in monosyllables the kind questioning of Maria ; till daylight waned, and firelight encouraged the shy man to confidential chat.—Then, when he felt that his uncouthness was screened from notice, he would expand into a brilliant flow of anecdote, derived from literary and professional sources ; till the sisters ceased to wonder at the predilection for his society so long evinced by Sir John.

If the officious butler brought lights, as a hint that it was time for visitors to depart and ladies to attend to the dressing-bell, he became suddenly dumb, and never outstayed the warning.

At length the momentous crisis arrived, and the happy Wraysburys found themselves once

more parents of a son ; not, as on the former occasion, of a feeble infant ; but of a boy of the first magnitude, destined to do honour to the baronetage and to Harrals.—It was not, however, so much on that account that Sir John took pride in him, as because he beheld in him the precursor of a younger brother,—the future Wraysbury of Lynchcombe.

Poor little Netta subsided rapidly into insignificance. It was only aunt Sophy who made her as much as ever an object of attention.—Dear, pretty, loving little Netta,—so charmed with her new brother as even to submit patiently to the thraldom of the school-room, and the arrival of Miss Avesford, the patent governess,—the result of his auspicious birth.

Letters of congratulation arrived in quick succession from the three aunts of the future baronet ;—their husbands abounding in joy in a P.S. Even Harpsden seized the occasion to send his “heartfelt felicitations” under shelter of a flag of truce : with certain allegorical allusions

to olive-branches and peace-making, which Wraysbury might have accepted as genuine, had it not unluckily occurred to him that the living of Lynchcombe was worth twelve hundred a year, and the present incumbent on the verge of his threescore and tenth.

"It is so truly kind of you, my dear Farmer, to spare me the bore of a *tête-à-tête* with that dear good Sophy, now that I am a temporary widower," said Sir John to his old friend, whom he often persuaded to stay dinner, when he called in Carlton Gardens, inquiring after the "mother and child." "Sophy is a good soul; but she has not her sister's mental endowments. My wife, however, will miss her sadly when she goes back to Denny Cross, which she insists upon doing the moment Lady Wraysbury is about again."

But the rich baronet's home-dinings were by no means so frequent as those of "poor" John Woolston's had been.—He was not only re-elected into his old club, but into several others, both

fashionable and political ;—and the great people of his county, the Duke of Groby and Lord Marrington, exchanged visits with him, and were prompt in their invitations, the moment they arrived in town. It was understood that Sir John Wraysbury would seize the first opportunity to buy his way into parliament. At some future time, it was probable that the local consequence derived from his newly-acquired estates might even promote him to the representation of his county.

“ My wife a woman of fashion ?—No ! any thing but *that !* ” he exclaimed, when Roger Farmer, on seeing the diamonds of the late Lady Woolston brought home by an eminent jeweller reset for the mother of the heir of Harrals, began to tax her husband with a new order of ambition. “ But I wish her to take in society the place that belongs to her, and which every one appears inclined to concede her. The Duchess of Groby proposed, of her own accord, to present her at court. Lady Marrington

wants to share an opera-box with her. My Northamptonshire neighbours are well aware," he added, in a lower key, as if somewhat nervous, concerning the rejoinder likely to be made by his sarcastic friend, "that it depends only on myself to press my claims to the dormant barony of Fitz-Alwyne ; which my father with so limited an income never chose to do.—"

" Hillo,—hillo,—a *peerage* too ?" — cried Farmer, in just the tone anticipated by Sir John. — " Why, my dear fellow, you are rising so rapidly in the world, that we shall be obliged to peg you down with cords, like a balloon, lest, in your over-inflation, you should rise into the clouds and burn yourself against the sun."

Wraysbury entertained a disagreeable suspicion that he was laughed at ; particularly when Farmer added with a smile, — " I should be deuced sorry, I know, to stand between you and the Woolsack, if you happened to have a mind to it. Such a lucky dog as you are, I should consider my burial-certificate made out."

Meanwhile, no supplement to the coal-merchant's bill, or any other domestic vexation, came to disturb the christening-day of little Lord Fitz-Alwyne *in nubibus*.—His sponsors were appropriately aristocratic: and the festival that requited their attendance, called forth the most flowing periods of the fashionable journals. There was only one sad heart present on the occasion: that of the mother, who had already presented a son at the altar, and lost sight of him in the grave. But her husband was indignant at her misplaced tears. That Harry Groby Woolston Wraysbury, son to a millionaire and godson to a duke, was marked for a brighter destiny, he assured her as confidently, as though he had received to that effect a “private and confidential” missive from the Fates.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Molyneuxes returned to their gilded Belgravian cage, on the approach of Easter ; or, to speak more intelligibly, at the close of the hunting season ; the Honourable Gerald having lavishly enjoyed his truffles and claret, his plate and damask napery throughout the winter months, at the expense of the father and mother, whom he defined to his St. James's Street familiars as the “ slowest coaches on the road ;”— eking out the one day’s sport per week, afforded by his solitary hunter, by mounts from brothers, cousins, friends, and neighbours, to not one of

whom would he have afforded in return the loan of a wheelbarrow. The Honourable Gerald, without a merit either moral or intellectual, seemed to fancy he had come into the world with especial and gratuitous claims on the good offices of all mankind.

Like Count Almaviva in the play—that play as instructive as a sermon,—the only exertion incumbent on him had been “*la peine de naître*.”

“ How amazingly your brother has made his way in so short a time ! ” said he to his wife, after his first visit to Carlton Gardens ;—apparently astonished that a well-born man, with an income of seventy or eighty thousand pounds, should have emerged without his aid from the Hendon omnibus and family trap of Denny Cross, into proprietorship of the neatest equipages in London.

“ Yes,—Lady Wraysbury is a very different person from Mrs. Woolston ; and the dowdy sister has judiciously returned to her dairy and

cauliflowers. I wonder whether John, who behaves so shabbily to *us*, has done any thing for those people at Denny Cross?"

"Done *what*?—His capital is no more at his disposal than at ours. He might certainly make an allowance to old Pennington, or to any of us, out of his income,—of which he will never have spirit to spend a fourth. Nay, I should not be surprised if the very interest of it sufficed him."

"I should ;—for he was affable enough to show me the ground-plan of the house he is about to build, as if expressly to topple into the sea, from the edge of some Dorsetshire down.—He told me would be finished in three years; and was to be completed out of his income!"—

"A hint perhaps that we had little to expect from his generosity."

"Generosity is a word that has no place in my brother's vocabulary. John was always cold-blooded and selfish. In alluding to-day to the Wroughtons, he had the audacity to say that

the thousand pounds left them by old Wraysbury, was a great windfall for them; as they could have no expectations from him."

"Pretty cool, I think, from a man who has just inherited a million and a half of money and a fine estate; besides having a hundred and thirty thousand pounds filliped into his face!" exclaimed her husband.

Mrs. Molyneux shrugged her shoulders, from irritation. "The lower classes," said she, "are always in arms against the graspingness of the aristocracy, and the *sang froid* with which the great enjoy luxury and leisure at the expense of the little.—But what is the inequality between Castle and Cottage, I should like to know, compared with that which affords purple and fine linen to an elder brother, and sackcloth and ashes to all the rest!"

Having uttered which curt philippic against the laws of primogeniture, she looked down with the air of a martyr on the velvet sleeve and ruffles of Brussels lace, for which, in spite of

old Wraysbury's legacy, she had never dreamed of paying.

Though short-sighted enough to fancy that she was "a star, and dwelt apart," Mrs. Molyneux abided at one of the lowest points of social order: whereas the old Squire of Denny Cross, so far from submitting to have "something done for him" by his wealthy son-in-law, had been strongly opposed to his daughter Sophy even remaining the inmate of the Wraysburys, now that their overbrimming riches enabled them to dispense with her kindly presence.

Both Gerald and his wife, meanwhile, were nettled to find that, without any intervention on their part, the Wraysburys had received courteous invitations from Lord and Lady Dinton. The Dintons were not brilliant people, but their light burned steadily and clear. Their equitable minds could not be brought, by their son's representations, to impute it as a fault to Sir John that two of his nearest relatives had given him a life-interest in their property; and when, in

the course of the solemn dinner-party held in his honour, he announced an intention of occasionally residing at Harrals, they hailed the news as satisfactory alike to the politics and pleasures of the county.

But the announcement, easily as it was made, and applausively as it was received, was wrung out of a penitent corner of Wraysbury's heart.—From the moment of the birth of his boy,—like all only sons, the sweetest infant that ever saw the light,—he had reproached himself with the colossal nature of his plans at Lynchcombe.—Though unable to alienate a guinea of the principal of Adam Wraysbury's fortune in favour of the heir of Harrals, yet by appropriating at least forty thousand pounds a year of his splendid income, for three years to come, to perfect the estate in which part of the Wraysbury funds was invested, he seemed to have earned a right to devote a portion of the residue to equalising, in some degree, the positions of his children.

But if he owed it to the future Sir Harry Groby Woolston to insure him a comfortable home, he ought, perhaps, to have considered the matter before he signed the contract for his Dorsetshire Palazzo.—However, it was not yet too late.—He must screw down his family expenses by an additional ten thousand a year or so, which would still leave him twenty thousand, for personal enjoyment. “And twenty thousand a year, to myself and Maria, with our moderate views and pretensions,” was his inward musing, “is, Heaven knows, more than enough.”—

That any portion of his overgrown wealth was due to his country or his kind,—to forward public undertakings,—to facilitate the struggles of science,—to prosper the progress of the arts,—to relieve the moral and physical wants of the great nation in which the favour of Providence had ordained his birth,—never, for a moment, occurred to the old head on shoulders no longer young. He merely glanced at the subject by

reminding himself that, notwithstanding the economy incumbent on him, he should be “ pestered to death by directors of public charities and institutions ; the sort of people privileged to pick one’s pocket with the best intentions ; who expect enormous subscriptions in return for their trumpery correspondence.—Impossible for *them* to know how miserably his hands were tied.”—

While making up his mind in what proportion to subdivide his means for these purposes, he bethought him of taking counsel with his friend Farmer : a man too wise and practical to fancy that, to those who count their thousands by hundreds, a guinea is no longer a guinea.— But, on calling at the Albany, he was informed that Mr. Farmer was out of town.

“ Where was he gone, and when he was likely to return ?”—was the next question.

But old Margaret could not answer. Though an incomparable manufacturer of pepper-pots, the itinerary of her master’s travels was

not vouchsafed in exchange for her bills of fare.

"Gone probably to look at some estate, for purchase," thought Sir John, as he retraced his steps along the covered way of Bachelors' Paradise. "Farmer has a craze for landed investment.—He might as well have told me, though.—I should have endeavoured to find for him something within reach of Lynchcombe. In time, one might perhaps have persuaded him to reside there. But I'm afraid *not*,—Farmer is too confirmed an old bachelor for country-life.—A London man—every inch of him. Farmer is not half himself when he gets half a mile from the Alfred."

A few days afterwards, among the letters placed on his breakfast-table,—which were in the same ratio as regarded those he used to receive at Maple Hill, as his broad lands under the sun compared with the proportions of the weedy garden, into which that luminary seemed to think it *infra dig.* to shine,—was one ad-

dressed in the bold, straight-forward hand-writing of the Q.C.

"As the fewest words are best when news of importance is to be communicated, my dear Wraysbury," wrote he, "I use no circumlocution to inform you that I am going to be married. To whom, my date will have already apprised you."

His dear "Wraysbury" had never looked at the date.—But the glance which now brought the words "Denny Cross" before his startled eyes, almost caused him to let fall the letter.

The simple, common-place, pleasant-faced, but far from pretty Sophy Pennington,—to be chosen as companion for life by that man of incomparable faculties and attainments!—How to account for it except by the remaining date of "May 4th,"—a season of love and joy that warms the most rugged old tree into blossom.

But then, the sentiment that attracted him to Denny Cross, must have been of far earlier date; the growth of fireside interviews, and

those family dinners where he had so often apologised to his friend for the humdrum company of his sister-in-law.

On resuming his letter, he found that the bridegroom-elect condescended to ample confession.

"I fell in love," wrote he,—and there was not a symptom of shame in the clear firm handwriting, recording the avowal, "so long ago as when I dined with you last year at the Clarendon; and every opportunity afforded me since, has convinced me that I then judged rightly in believing this dear Sophy of ours to be the type of every thing that is best in woman-kind: true and just, in word, thought, and deed; unselfish in heart, unprejudiced in mind.—As she has chosen to overlook my uncouthness in favour of a sincere attachment, we are to be made one as soon as the lawyers will conjoin our worldly goods: and Sophy writes to request her sister's countenance and presence at the wedding.—But lest I should convert my letter into

a three-volume novel, by endeavouring to describe my present happiness, I hastily conclude by expressing a hope that you will find no fault with my henceforward subscribing myself,

“ Your brother as well as friend,

“ R. F.”

Decidedly the most startling communication he had received since the broad sheet of Messrs. Wortham and Stock, communicating the contents of Adam Wraysbury's will ! The provoking part of it was, that he could not prevail on Maria to be as much astonished as himself; not even when she heard the amount of thousands per annum attributed by the profession to Roger Farmer. She was perhaps too much pleased to leave room for any other feeling ; or was too fully aware of her sister's high appreciation of his moral worth and charm of companionship, to wonder that affection should follow.— To her husband's constant recurrence to “ six or eight thousand a year at

the very least, and not a relation in the world," she turned a deaf ear.—The man, and not the money, rendered it a splendid match for Sophia.

"And to *me*," she exclaimed, "what a comfort!—We shall meet daily. The happiness of my life will be doubled."

For Sophia Pennington's letter, after announcing to her sister with the same sensible succinctness characterising the communication of her sober lover, her impending change of name, went on to state that though Mr. Farmer, in deference to her predilections, had proposed that they should settle in the country, she had decided in favour of London.—So complete a change of habits, she felt, would never suit him.—Sophia evidently considered her bridegroom as too old a tree to be transplanted.

When the Wraysburys proceeded to Denny Cross for the wedding, they were not a little surprised and vexed to find that, of the whole family, the old squire alone remained averse

to the match.—He hated lawyers. The whole profession was typified in his mind by the country attorneys, who had occasionally dragged his pockets, and the judges who came with trumpets and shawms to transport sheep-stealers and acquit all murderers who could persuade twelve people in their senses to swear that they were out of theirs. And he consequently regarded with a distrustful eye the large fortune amassed by the middle-aged man, who so much resembled the master of the grammar-school where he had not received—but been defrauded of, an education.—It was with a sore heart and clouded brow that he saw Mr. and Mrs. Farmer drive off in their comfortable travelling carriage, on a bridal excursion to the lakes.

Throughout the remainder of the day, ay ! and for several days following, he was seen drumming vacantly on the window - panes through which he had witnessed the departure of the newly-married couple.

But even his gentle daughter Bessy, the

member of the Denny Cross family best skilled to interpret the erratic melodies with which her father enlivened this monotonous music, was puzzled to say whether, on the present occasion, the tune pretended to be "Merrily danced the Quaker's Wife,"—or the "Dead March in Saul."

It certainly neither denoted cheerfulness in *him*, nor imparted it to his involuntary auditors.

CHAPTER XV.

MUCH has been said and written of

The perils that environ
The man who meddles with cold iron;

and the perils of the man who meddles with it in the shape of a trowel, are indeed deserving of sympathy. Before autumn set in,—before the Farmers returned southward from the tour they had extended to the Highlands,—Sir John Wraysbury began to wish he had been less precipitate in his demolition of the old hall.

For he had now no roof over his head, save

that in Carlton Gardens. Harrals was dismantled,—Lynchcombe a mass of rubbish. Months must pass before even the foundations of the new house could be laid. Though strongly disposed to accomplish the foreign tour, so sadly thwarted the preceding year by his father's death, he was as unwilling to place himself out of reach of his architect, as Maria to expose her precious nursling to the risks of foreign travel. After much hesitation, therefore, and some grumbling, he found himself reduced to the usual Great British resource,—the coast;—with all its rumbling of bathing machines, and smell of seaweed.

Already, however, the accusation formerly hazarded by his friend Farmer, that he was wanting in moderation of mind, was becoming verified. With a healthy, happy family around him, and all but fabulous opulence at command, he was far from cheerful.—Enormous sources of anxiety seemed opened by his millions. Wortham and Stock on one hand,—Henderson and Hall

on the other,—were perpetually besetting him with letters of business consultation, which a better philosopher would have answered by “Decide for yourselves.”—But Sir John had from the first manifested that, in every tittle, he was to be the arbitrator: as fidgety and circumstantial, now, as when adding up his weekly accounts at Maple Hill.

Amidst these vexations, he was again provoked by what he considered the apathy of his wife.—Lady Wraysbury, a woman of pious mind, was of opinion that, favoured as they were, a single murmur against Providence was sinful. If *they* were not content with their lot, who on earth could be satisfied!—For *her* happiness, her two beautiful children sufficed; and such grievances as a contention with the proprietor of a stone-quarry, or a trifling embezzlement by the confidential agent of a plantation in Ceylon, were, she thought, unworthy consideration.

But to Sir John, even the children were less a source of delight than of old.—The flourishing

little heir of Harrals, even when he came to be old enough to lisp his father's name, was not half so dearly loved as had been the little Johnny, who lay forgotten in a cemetery in Kent,—whose smiles had brightened a home where nothing else was cheerful; and Master Harry was hailed chiefly as a harbinger of the future brother, who was to be one of the richest commoners in England, and might hereafter achieve a second peerage in the family, as Wraysbury, Lord Lynchcombe.

As to little Netta, endearing as she was, he could not look upon her without anxiety. If this boy of boys should never make his appearance,—if, after all his anxieties, the enormous inheritance of old Adam should fall to the eldest daughter instead of to a second son,—what a deathblow to his hopes,—what a misfortune to the future heiress!—For the money-loving John was one of those who believe that a rich woman has no chance of being sought and wedded for herself.—So many instances had occurred within

his knowledge of heiresses consigned to utter misery by spendthrifts—who, having married them for money, seemed to think that when the money was gone, the tie it had served to cement was also nullified—that already he looked upon the little girl who, under Miss Avesford's tutorage, sat spelling the hard words in Mrs. Markham's History of England, as a predestined victim.

Affording by his discontent additional proof of the truism, that “Man never *is*, but always *to be, blest*,” he fancied his boy and girl would become a thousand times more precious to him, if a third pledge of love were vouchsafed. Such an event was to perfect his epoch of mortal happiness. But in the interim, he worried himself about nothings, which, however he might monster them, remained trifles in the eyes of other people.

To his new brother-in-law, he had scarcely courage to apply for sympathy in his imaginary distresses. But when, on arriving in town at the commencement of his second win-

ter, he found the newly-married couple as comfortably settled in a newly-furnished house in Eaton Square, as ever the old bachelor had been in his chambers in the Albany, a good lesson was afforded to him, by the celerity with which the change had been accomplished.

"But why impute to magic the result of a little method?" said Farmer, when his admiration was warmly expressed. "Having once determined to take a wife, the purchase of a home for her became a necessary preliminary; and as soon as Sophy accepted me for better for worse,—with very little hope, alas! of the former change,—I assigned a certain sum to a first-rate upholsterer, to furnish it."

"With no instructions,—no interdictions?"

"Only those of Polonius,—that it was to be 'rich, but not gaudy.' I knew Sophia too well to fancy she could entertain whims or fancies about the colour of a chintz, or shape of a wardrobe."

"At least, if the experiment were rash, it has answered. Your house is perfection."

“Because upholsterers understand upholsterers’ business, better than I do.—If the man had employed me in former days to plead for him, he would not have pretended to instruct me how to manage his cause.”

“I don’t see that the cases are parallel.”

“They are *not*. But I want to impress upon you the impolicy of over-legislation in trifling matters; the besetting sin of English nature!”

“But why impress it especially on *me*? ”

“Because I heard yesterday, at my club, that you had declined the seat offered to you for Wadhurst, on the plea that you were at present too much occupied by your private affairs to have time for attendance in parliament.”

“Such was the motive I chose to assign. But I understood that both the offer and my refusal were to remain confidential.”

“Merchison mentioned the subject to me as to your nearest friend; hoping that I might de-

termine you to rescind your resolution.—So short a time has elapsed since I mentioned to him your anxiety to get into the House”—

“That he fancies me a weathercock, blown about with every breath. No matter. I have, to say nothing of other motives, made up my mind that, till my own affairs are settled, I will not meddle with those of the nation.”

“Are any man’s affairs *ever* settled? Till the coffin lid is soldered down upon us, my dear Wraysbury, is our time ever our own? The Lower House contains scores of men of business, and the Upper House as many of substance, whose ex-parliamentary duties are fully as responsible as your own.”

Sir John did not dispute the fact; but he had made up his mind.

“I acknowledge my obligations to you, my dear Farmer,” said he, somewhat peevishly. “I am free to confess that, but for your good word, I might have whistled for my grand uncle’s fortune. But even this does not justify my relin-

quishing to your control my liberty of conscience, or freedom of action."

" God forbid !" cried his old master, smiling at his petulance ; " I have trouble enough to manage my own. As to obligations, John, the advantage is decidedly on your side ; for if you owe me a fortune, I am indebted to you for the domestic happiness which quadruples the value of mine. Till you forced me to your fireside, I had never seen or understood the charms of married life."

The argument was allowed to drop, as all arguments ought to do, which are not intended to end in a quarrel.—To Wraysbury, the society of his old friend was priceless ; not only from his superior knowledge and judgment, but because he was one of the few to whom the new millionaire did not impute interested motives. For already, he was infected by the mental malady common to all the children of Mammon, of fancying that every body,—equals,—inferiors,—superiors,—were bent on levying con-

tributions upon his purse. Like a valve shut by pressure, his heart had closed spontaneously under the weight of his gold. He had remained true to his hasty word, that not a member of his family by whom, in their poverty, his wife and children had been so cruelly neglected, should profit by his change of fortunes. With the Molyneuxes he was courteous, but distant. The nearest approach ventured towards him by Harpsden, now a widower, was a solicitation for his interest to get a presentation to the Charter-House for his son Olave, by way of hint that his own means would not afford him a suitable education. And when Clara wrote to him, about Christmas time, a letter damp with tears, entreating what she called the *loan* of one hundred pounds for the discharge of her private bills, in sending her *two*, (scarcely a pinch of dust out of his income), he begged her not to reckon upon a renewal of the gift as an annual gratuity.

He who, at Maple Hill, had so inveighed

against the flintiness of rich relations, took little heed whether the coals or wood of Harpsden and Wroughton exposed them to the dunning under which he had smarted. Nor was it one of the least recommendations to his friendship enjoyed by Farmer, that, the banker's-book of the Q.C. being always in a wholesome state, he had no occasion to turn his friends to account.

He was too much self-engrossed to perceive that, on the other hand, the predilection of Farmer in his favour had undergone considerable diminution. *His* soul was far too generous to sympathise with a man so thoroughly wrapt up in the things of this world. With all due allowance for the injurious lessons imbibed by John Woolston aforetime from the shabbiness of other people, it was difficult, nay, it was *impossible*, to forgive the narrowness of his egotism.

A far less pleasant companion than when softened by adversity, he could now talk and think of nothing but the rise and fall of public

securities,—the value of land,—the prospects of the harvest,—and, above all, of Lynchcombe.—He seemed to know the price of every block of stone, every foot of timber on the premises ; and was constantly dragging down poor Maria into Dorsetshire, though a third olive branch was budding, that he might surprise the wasters of his substance, and the carelessness of his clerk of the works.

Deeply mortified to perceive that the intellect he had praised so highly to old Wraysbury, was now concentrated on questions of petty profit and loss, such as even necessitous men render subservient to the higher purposes of life,—Roger Farmer gradually receded from the society of the slave of Mammon. But when poor Lady Wraysbury's day of anguish at length arrived, and, after unusual suffering and considerable danger, she gave birth to a second daughter, even the gentle Sophia lost all patience with her brother-in-law, when, having replied by a coarse imprecation to the announcement that the infant

was a girl, he rushed out of the dressing-room where he had been awaiting the result, and hurried down stairs without one word of kindness or commiseration for his suffering wife.

She comforted herself, on describing to her indignant husband all that had occurred, by the conviction that Maria would never know by what bitterness her poor little Constance had been assailed on the threshold of life.

CHAPTER XVI.

BUT alas ! not a syllable had escaped the ear of Maria ; and her first feeling, in her weak and depressed state, was a desire to die. The charm of her life was at an end.—

With renewed strength, however, came higher considerations. She remembered that she was not sent into the world for herself alone ; and that the burthens appointed for her must be borne with meekness. If the illusions of life were over, its duties remained.

Should she die, what would become of her children, when left to the disposal of a father

On leaving London, Sir John had turned a deaf ear to his wife's expression of a hope that before they returned to town, she might be indulged with a short visit to her old father and her sister Bessy.—Denny Cross was quite out of his line of march. Even when they approached it so near as Burleigh,—he assigned a long-existing engagement to Molyneux Castle, as a motive for delay.

“ He was afraid Lord and Lady Dinton would be offended if it transpired that they had been so near, without fulfilling their promise.”

To the Castle, therefore, they went. But its real attraction to Sir John Wraysbury consisted in being situated within ten miles of Harrals ; the future family seat of the chimerical Woolstons, Lords Fitz-Alwyne.

The wandering couple could not have stumbled on a country visit more advantageous to all parties.—The motherly nature of the poor old Countess was comforting to the weak spirits of Lady Wraysbury ; and the simplicity and ease

of the establishment afforded a good lesson to Sir John; who was beginning to exhibit as much of the fussy ostentation of a *nouveau riche* as was compatible with his closeness of fist.

Had his sister and Gerald Molyneux been staying at the Castle, he might have felt less inclined for the visit. But a yachting friend had given them and their children a cast to Naples, where they were to spend the winter; and Lord Dinton's eldest son, Lord Wilchester, who was apt to absent himself so long as the brother who was so much finer a gentleman than himself, was quartered at the Castle, was now settled there for the autumn; a charming addition to its society.

In former days, when John Woolston of Harrows had been, during his long vacations, a frequent guest of the Dintons, and of course united in consequence, by the vulgar tongue of county gossip, to one of their daughters, there had been as much intimacy between the heirs-apparent of

the two families, as is usually termed friendship.—But the sentiment must have been, in truth, of a flimsier quality.—For from the period of the Denny Cross match, when John Woolston slunk out of the society of his caste, no endeavour had been made by Lord Wilchester to find him out ; whereas, had real friendship existed, it would have shone like a star, the brighter for surrounding darkness.

Mutual dissatisfaction had kept them apart. Either Lord Wilchester, who was devotedly attached to his sisters, fancied that Woolston had encouraged the partiality of Lady Mary after his affections and hand were engaged to another ; or he had detected, under a fair seeming, the selfishness of Woolston's nature ; for his courtesies had never risen to their former level.—A little shy,—a little deaf,—his lordship's brusquerie and absence of mind often caused him to be accused of arrogance. He was pronounced to be, as people often are 'when there is no other fault to find with them,—a little *odd*. Whereas no

man was ever more decidedly *even*,—in temper, temperament, and principle.

Insignificant in stature, there was nothing intellectual in his countenance. There seldom *is* in the countenance of a deaf man. And very often had he been humiliated, in early childhood, by the comparisons of the nursery, between his straight hair and meek deportment and the curly locks, buoyant spirits, and brilliant eyes of Master Gerald.—But if humbled, he was not envious; and though, in after-years, he became less fond of his handsome brother than of any other member of the family, it was not from any thing rather than jealousy of his superior qualifications.

Sir John Wraysbury met him, on his arrival at Molyneux Castle, with lively curiosity. Their relative positions were considerably altered by the ten years intervening since their last interview; and the surface of their natures had probably become a little honey-combed by the wear and tear of life.

But though his own was considerably more vibrant and restless than in his Temple days, that of the Viscount appeared to be more than ever composed and sedate.—The only physical charm he had ever possessed, one of the sweetest of human voices, was now enhanced by a mild, reflective turn of countenance, which more than supplied the place of regularity of features ; and though still reserved, his deportment had lost its awkward diffidence. The interim had evidently been spent in peace and quietness, though among people of the world.

But where ?—Lord Wilchester's name was unenrolled in the lists of fashion. He had never entered a London ball-room since that first season in which the shy boy had been hunted down by ravenous mammas, in eager pursuit of *partis*.—He was seldom seen at an opera ;—never, except as *chaperon* to his sisters. —He was not a systematic diner-out ; nor was morning visiting in his nature.—Where, then, had his moral education been completed ?

Simply, in parliament. Though some years the junior of Wraysbury, Lord Wilchester was now eight-and-thirty ; and for more than a dozen years past, his attendance in the House of Commons had been as steady as that of the Speaker. Most young men are born with a military turn ; a few lads incline towards the navy ; and a few (prigs over their very pap-boat) aspire instinctively to a wig and gown and the woolsack. Lord Wilchester was born with a strong tendency towards public life ; and being exonerated by his auspicious position from official ambition, and conscious that his infirmity of deafness disqualified him as a placeman, he was content to be cited as the hardest-working member of the House.

A careful, candid, and intelligent listener, he seldom spoke ; never, unless some point required immediate elucidation which no one else, present, was able or willing to elucidate. But his few sensible and opportune words were always listened to with respect ; and many of the

prosers who persecute the ear of the House, would have done well to take lesson by his brevity.

But from these habits of attention, arose habits of deduction.—The ever-reasoning mind became prompt of judgment.—The steam was always up ; and the leading men of the day were unanimous in expressing their regret that Lord Wilchester did not come more prominently forward. They concluded that he was reserving himself for the Upper House.

He smiled, however, on learning from Sir John Wraysbury that Roger Farmer, for whom he was steady in his admiration and veneration, and with whom, in earlier years, he had become intimately acquainted in parliamentary committees, had expressed such an opinion.

“ Few men give credit to another for remaining voluntarily in the background,”—said he. “ But Farmer can afford to do so ;—for in another class of life, *my story is his own*.—He preferred literature and his quiet chambers, to heated,

noisy courts. *I* like domestic life. The Session serves as my recreation ; as to some, their cigar, and to others, their stall at the Opera. As to being pinioned in Downing Street at this season of the year, nothing but an imperative sense of duty would determine me to give up the pleasure of free air and a sporting life. My services are luckily not in request.—‘ Sparta hath many a worthier son than I.’ ”

Sir John endeavoured to make out a parallel case for himself, as a plea for keeping out of parliament :—in hopes, perhaps, that Lord Wilchester would express as strong an opinion as Farmer had done, that he owed it to himself and the country to write himself down M.P. For he seemed a little nettled when Lord Wilchester calmly replied, that *in his* place, he should probably exhibit the same reluctance.

“ It is your happy privilege to restrict your sphere of usefulness to the duties of a county magistrate,” he argued.—“ But I, an hereditary legislator, am forced to learn my A, B, C, by

working my way from the shell to the fifth form."

Poor Wraysbury, who fancied that his dormant claim to the barony of Fitz-Alwyne was familiar to all the world, or at least to his own county, had hardly patience to be thus quietly put down. But he saw that the offence was inadvertent; and that Lord Wilchester thought no more of his coronet than if it had been a cotton night-cap.

Lady Wraysbury, meanwhile, had seldom found herself happier than under the roof of the Dintons.—The homely kindness of the Countess, the gentle manners of the sensible, sociable daughters, afforded a charming contrast to the habits of Groby Abbey; which was a flagrant specimen of fashionable London,—*plus* a French flower-garden and patent billiard-table,—*minus* the perpetual change and illusion which converts bits of worthless glass into a gay kaleidoscope.—Over their cheerful work-table, Lady Dinton talked to her of her children; and Lady

Mary and Lady Jemima of those of Emma, which seemed to be dearly loved and missed at the Castle.—She fancied, indeed, that it was for Emma's sake they took so much interest in her and the nursery to which she was longing to return. It would have been difficult to convince her of their sincere regret that Gerald had not chosen a wife a few miles nearer home than Harrals.

But she soon found that the absence from England of Emma and her husband was regarded in the family as a relief. The Gerald Molyneuxes required such a round of excitement,—such a change of visitors. Display was a portion of their existence. They could not live without an audience.

"My father is getting old," said Lady Mary, one day when her mother was out of the room,— "and a constant succession of company wearies him. But Gerald and Emma become almost ill of ennui, when we are, as now, a family party."

"But papa is not the only one to whom their passion for a crowded dinner-table and blaze of lights is insupportable," added Lady Jemima. "For the last two winters, Wilchester has wholly absented himself from the Castle. My father has given him a shooting-box in Bedfordshire, where he is privileged to lead a more peaceable life."

"I don't think, however, that he would have obtained Havermead during my father's lifetime," interposed Lady Mary, "had it been supposed he would so often escape to it from the racket created here by Mrs. Molyneux's passion for society."

"Is it quite fair," pleaded Lady Wraysbury, "to rest the whole blame upon Emma?—At Harrals she led a very quiet life"—

"Too quiet, perhaps"—

"And it is only since she became your brother's wife, that she adopted her present habits of dissipation and expense."

"Too true, I am afraid!" was the candid

reply. "But I fear it was similarity of taste that brought them together."

"More likely that she adopted those of the man she loved,"—persisted Maria.—"I have seen as striking an example of it, lately, in my own family. A sister of mine, the least studious among us, having married a book-worm, is now never happy out of a library; while my sister Bessy, so devoted to my father that she never quits Denny Cross, will probably settle when she loses him, as the wife of some Northamptonshire squire, and forget that she was ever fond of a book."

"But how came it that Mr. Farmer did not prefer the bookish sister?"—inquired Jemima, much interested by her frankness.

"He never saw her till he had fallen in love with Sophy, who was on a visit to us in town:—luckily, perhaps,—for Bessy would not have married a man so much older than herself."

"I was not aware, my dear Lady Wraysbury,"

interposed Lady Dinton, who had joined the circle, "that you had a sister still unmarried, or I should have invited her to meet you here."

Maria replied gratefully ; but assured her that no invitation, however tempting, would induce her to quit Denny Cross, even for a day. "Bessy was her father's constant companion and attendant."

"Then we must have endeavoured to persuade Mr. Pennington to bear her company."

"My father has never left home since my mother's death," replied Maria ; "not even to visit one of his children."

And Lady Dinton, accustomed to see "nice customs curtsey to great kings," could not but respect the humble family which, amid the strifes and inroads of the world, preserved habits and opinions of its own.

"At all events," said she, "as you are to spend a few days at Denny Cross after leaving us, you must allow us to drive over during your

visit, and make acquaintance with another member of a family with whom we are proud to be connected."

Maria, remembering that, in her youth, Molyneux Castle was always spoken of by their fire-side as a grand place, situated in a distant part of the county, was almost prompted by her pony-chaise view of time and space, to suggest the distance intervening. But the recollection of all she had been enabled to accomplish by Lord Dinton's fine set of horses, satisfied her that she must submit to have the quiet of poor old Denny Cross interrupted by an incursion of coronets.

While this was passing, Sir John Wraysbury had been accomplishing a hurried visit to Harrals.—No spot in the united kingdom was more distasteful to him than the house of his fathers ; where his neighbours, rich and poor, conspired in the idea that he was defrauding them of their right to participate in his monstrous wealth :—the rich, resenting the closing up of

the old house, to whose hospitalities they felt intitled :—the poor, looking in vain for even the crumbs that ought to fall from a rich man's table.—Every soul in the parish was aware that Sir John Woolston Wraysbury of Harrals was one of the most opulent men in the three kingdoms. Yet he did even less for them than had been done by his penurious father ; except that such farms as had fallen into his hands, were progressively placed in order, with a view to more advantageous letting.

Instead of making his appearance, as the villagers expected, in “a coach and six,” according to traditions of old Sir Bernard, his grandfather,—or even in a coach and four, as the elders of the place remembered to have seen Sir Harry and my lady,—Sir John came stealing upon them once or twice a year, in a fly ;—to confer with the steward about the minimum of repairs necessary to secure the safety of that portion of the house where the family pictures and a few old cabinets were deposited, under his keeping ; the

rest of the time-worn mansion being allowed to stand or tumble, as it listed.

For Sir John, though his son and heir was nearly two years old, still delayed laying the foundation stone of the projected residence, the erection of which was to encroach further on an income so narrowed by the overgrown proportions of Lynchcombe.—The interest of the large sum bequeathed by Lady Woolston being absorbed by the restoration of his dilapidated farms, he had resolved, with the doggedness which was one of his characteristics, that not a stone of the new house should be laid, till the aggregate of three years of the Harrals' rent roll secured the means of its completion.—He would not fall into the same error there, as at Lynchcombe. He would create only such an abode for the future Sir Harry as might be creditably kept up on an income of eight thousand a year.

But though prudence predominated over his designs and estimates, and warned him still to

defer that first clash of brick and trowel, as awful to an experienced ear as the first fire from the trenches of a besieged fortress, the demoralised aspect of the old place produced as much emotion in his heart, as it is easy to create in that of a great capitalist, otherwise than by the fall of the twentieth part of a fraction in the public funds.

It was the period of the year most favourable to the beauties of the spot.—The beechwoods, tinged with amber by the early frosts, formed an appropriate background to the old pile ; and the Virginian clematis, which crimsoned the venerable walls, reduced their complexion, by comparison, to a milder hue. The fading year, in short, was in unison with the falling house.

There was something mournful too in the one old hound that went limping about the premises ; the last relic of its better days. Grass and weeds encumbered the stable-yard. The branches of the long unpruned fig-tree in the corner, straggled out like feelers seeking to at-

tach themselves to the rare visitant.—Well did Sir John remember the delight of rushing to that spot, on his half-yearly emancipation from the heavy scholarship of Rugby;—the sieve hastily held out to his pony and pigeons; and the glee with which he used to be greeted by both them and the old iron-grey coachman, who never failed to announce to “Marser Woolson,” that he was “growing, sir, growing like a little weed.”

His conscience, feeble as it was becoming, almost smote him, that he had so thoroughly abandoned that once-loved home. But was it his fault?—Had he not been banished by his father from his gates, till the tie between him and Harrals was rent asunder?—“Alas! no,”—whispered the inward monitor—“Your own temper, and not your father’s, pronounced your sentence of exile.” And following up his self-recriminations, he was almost inclined to admit that it would have been better for all parties had he submitted from the first to parental authority.

The old baronet, who knew the world, had wisely foreseen that he required a wife of stronger character, and more extended connections, than Maria Pennington of Denny Cross.

While wading through the dead leaves of the old shrubbery, on whose gravel walks he had first resolved to brave the opposition of his family, and complete his engagement,—though he rendered justice to her good qualities, as an amiable, inoffensive woman, who dearly loved her children, and scrupulously obeyed her husband,—he felt that a wife of higher energies would have been better suited to his fortunes. Her gentle insignificance was out of proportion with those of Lynchcombe ; and at Groby Abbey, she became suddenly a pygmy. Even in the humdrum circle at Molyneux Castle, it required all the cordiality of that kindly-affectioned family to raise her to their level.

As Farmer had originally predicted, the instability of John Woolston's character was becoming more and more apparent in Sir John Wrays-

bury ; and what was worse, nothing but his calculating turn of mind, kept in subjection the spirit of ostentation struggling within him; which, like Alonzo's spectre in the Castle of Otranto, threatened to grow too large for the fabric, and crumble it to ruins. An effect, perhaps, of the combination of Woolston and Wraysbury blood : —the Liverpool compting house and old hall at Harrals were at variance in his nature. The idiosyncrasies of the ancient baronet and the modern drysalter, created an antagonism.

As regarded himself, the mischief was irremediable. By his accession of wealth, his character had been indelibly stamped with worldliness ; which, though it could work no change in his ungifted and obscure wife, was likely to exercise a fatal influence over his daughter.—Unless another son should be born to him, which the delicacy of Lady Wraysbury's health rendered improbable, that quiet little girl, into whose ears Miss Avesford was infusing the leperous distilment of universal knowledge, yet whose

ideas of supreme indulgence consisted in a week's holidays at Denny Cross, spent in rambling with grandpapa about his farm, or with aunt Bessy among her poultry, would become the richest heiress in the kingdom.—“The heiress of Lynchcombe,” she would probably be called. She might live to be created—(who knows?—such things have been seen in this our money-worshipping kingdom,)—Baroness Lynchcombe, of that ilk. But even those who hailed her by that title, even the government from which it might be extorted by the territorial influence of the family, would never realise, as he did, the extent of the heterogeneous property amassed by old Adam:—the foreign investments, the colonial speculations, which seemed to increase and multiply beyond computation, in their native dirt,—like the swarming population of Saffron Hill.

“Ten years hence, that poor child, whom her nursemaid had formerly declared she was ashamed to walk with, at Ramsgate, because her bonnet was so shabby, will perhaps be courted by the

Duchess of Groby for one of her sons," mused the millionaire.—"For they may talk of the manœuvring of fine-lady mammas to marry their daughters : heiress-hunting, for their sons, has become quite as shameless a pursuit. And between my poor wife's supineness and hopeless ignorance of the world, Netta's brilliant prospects in life will probably be marred, unless I contrive to establish an early influence over her mind.—It is a great duty ;—a very serious responsibility!—I remember the time when I should have consulted Farmer whether to keep her young will in subjection to those older and wiser than herself ; or whether to strengthen it into higher energies of independence.—But Farmer's foolish marriage has immensely lowered his judgment in my estimation. Better wait till the dear child's character begins to develope itself.—On one point, however, I am quite decided. Neither Maria's family nor my own shall obtain the smallest control over her.—I could see by Harpsden's manner this morn-

ing, when I was examining, in Harrals church, the newly-erected monument to my father and mother, that he is prepared to eat any amount of dirt, to reinstate himself on friendly terms with the family ; and the Gerald Molyneuxes and Wroughtons are incessantly besieging me with letters, such as people usually address to the first Lord of the Treasury.—But it won't do.— My heart has become as chill towards them as they were cold to *us* in our misery at Maple Hill ; and should I obtain the parliamentary interest they predict and desire, it will not be exercised, I can tell them, to provide for those who would never have stirred one finger in my behalf !—In my boyhood, my father allowed my sisters to tyrannise over me.—Later in life, they fancied it their interest to show me the cold shoulder. They will find that nature's laws are not to be outraged with impunity.”

CHAPTER XVII.

If Emma Molyneux or her husband ever wrote from Naples to claim assistance from their wealthy brother, their establishment in that brilliant city certainly exhibited no want of comfort either real or artificial. Never had they been so well provided for. Adam Wraysbury's legacy had been turned to thrifty account ; and Lord Dinton had not only taken the education of their eldest boy off their hands, by placing his grandson at Harrow, but Lord Wilchester's suggestion that some addition to his brother's income might enable the pleasure-loving couple,

whose habits were so little consonant with the family taste, to enjoy the winter in Italy for which they had long been pining, and leave Mo-lyneux Castle to the sober tenor of its way, had caused the credit of the Honourable Gerald at his banker's to be increased by a few hundred pounds ;—as a troublesome member of the Upper House is occasionally provided for by an em-bassy.

And thus the arrangement which rendered the fireside at the Castle so cozy and sociable, sup-plied another pleasant lounge to the privileged idlers of Naples. And in few cities of Europe is idleness a pleasanter thing.—No one is ashamed of it, because, there, nothing seems in earnest. Even Vesuvius looks more like the decoration of a ballet than an eternal engine of destruction. Forsyth truly observes, “ If Naples be a paradise inhabited by devils, certainly they are merry devils.” Every winter the frivolities of fashion re-blossom in that genial atmosphere, as surely as the orange-trees in spring ; and neither

war nor cholera,—neither revolution nor fanaticism,—suffice to silence the jingling bells of the bauble of folly. The climate and its creations appeal too deliciously to the senses to allow the rougher experiences of life their proper influence.

Among the lovers of music, masquerading, and maccaroni,—among the aristocratic invalids endeavouring by private theatricals, and crowded balls, to moderate the beat of a feverish pulse,—gay, thoughtless people, like the Gerald Molyneuxes, were hailed with a ready welcome.—St. Marcel, the French Secretary of Legation, declared that they were the lightest in hand of any English savages with whom he had ever horded; and Lord Frederick Hill, a callow attaché, who, as a younger son of the Duke of Groby, was much petted by his fellow-countrymen, was seldom out of the house.

One sunny morning in February, when, after bringing them a packet of letters, arrived from England in the diplomatic bag, he was receiving

his postage dues from Mrs. Molyneux, in the form of a bunch of the sweetest double violets in the world, they were startled by a burst of laughter, followed by a scarcely-repressed oath, from Gerald, already deep in his letters.

“By Jove!” cried he, “even in this age of miracles, it is hardly to be believed!—I don’t suppose any parents ever took half as much pains to educate a child, as I have done to bring up my governor and his domestic calamities,—as Emma and I have named the rest of the family). But in spite of all my trouble, they go backwarder and backwarder, and become slower and slower, every year.”

“What is the matter?”—inquired Mrs. Molyneux; while Lord Frederick, not very ready of apprehension, felt uncertain whether the indignation of his friend were real or assumed.

“In Wilchester,” continued Gerald, pursuing his running commentary on the letter in his hand, “there was always an innate tendency towards the snob. But I *did* hope we had lived

enough at the Castle to produce a little improvement in my sisters. And after all, in England nearly as much as in America, it is the young ladies of a house who assign its tone and *cachet*."

"Not in ours, I promise you," rejoined Lord Frederick. "My sisters are never allowed to open their lips till they are married;—the reason, perhaps, why they never close them afterwards."

"But what have Jemima and Mary been doing to offend you?" inquired Mrs. Molyneux of her husband, still assorting the violets.

"Picking up all sorts of atrocious acquaintances."

"Such as——"

"Your brother and Lady Wraysbury have been on a visit at the Castle——"

"And are now at Groby Abbey, as my morning's letters inform me," added Lord Frederick, a little shocked at the ill-breeding of his friend, and unaware that the sentiments of his friend's

wife were scarcely more delicate than those of her husband.

" And at Lady Wraysbury's instance, of course, my mother and the girls have been over to Denny Cross ; and Jemima has the audacity to tell me that ' dear Willy,' as she always calls my prig of a brother, appears ' much struck with Bessy Pennington.'—The idea of one of our family so much as knowing the christian name of one of those people ! I should as soon think of being ' struck' by a dairy-maid."

" That was nearly what my father said to John, when he proposed to Maria," said Mrs. Molyneux, with an air of consternation. " But it did not prevent the marriage."

" The *marriage* ?—Why, you surely do not fancy even Wilchester such a muff as to be capable of—But, no, no !—I can't believe it.—I wouldn't believe it, if I saw the special license.—Though he pretends to have surveyed mankind from China to Peru,—from Australia to California,—scrutinizing those nearest to him

through a microscope, and those afar off through Lord Rosse's telescope, so that, being so wondrous wise in his own conceit, no man is so likely to be made a dupe,—I cannot think he would extinguish the family in that horrible quagmire at Denny Cross."

"How old is your brother?" inquired Lord Frederick, amazed at this outburst on the part of a man so systematically composed as Molyneux. "He was before my time; and our *chef* is too many years ahead of sixty, to allow a peerage in the House."

"Wilchester?—In his fortieth year, or thereabouts."

"Long past his first childhood, in short, and at a considerable distance from his second!—I think you are pretty safe. Though this is a dangerous moment in England, for bachelors, old or young. People get horribly domestic about Christmas time; especially in the Midland counties.—Candlelight, or rather owl-light, before dinner, is a trying ordeal for tender

hearts.—I trust, for your sake, Gerald, that the people at Denny Cross dine early.”

“*Dine!*” ejaculated Gerald, mentally glancing at the sort of beef-and-dumpling meal that probably passed under the name of dinner with the Penningtons—“I vow to Heaven, Emma,” added he, turning suddenly towards his wife, “I am almost sorry I agreed to leave Edgar in England. Those people will make a ploughboy of him. He knows more of the world already, than his Blue-bookish uncle and Mrs. Goodchild aunts.—But all the further good he gains at Harrow will be negatived, if he is to spend the holidays with a set of milk-and-water old maids.”

“Skim-milk and muddy-water, too, by your own account,” interrupted Lord Frederick, who hated to see the affairs of life taken so much in earnest. “But don’t cry out so lustily, my dear Gerald, before you’re hurt. Always time enough for a grievance.—So put your letters where I have derived much cheerfulness from thrusting

my Christmas bills,—into the stove ; and tell me what answer I am to give to Luigi about your bay mare ?”

Right glad was Mrs. Molyneux when this inquiry led the way to one of those horseflesh discussions, which had long initiated her into the language of the stable and tricks of the turf ; and finally, relieved her from their company. For though conjugal experience of the impolicy of stimulating the wrath of an angry man, had silenced her acknowledgment of being ten times more alarmed than her husband by the contents of Lady Jemima’s letter, she remembered only too well how many of their Northamptonshire neighbours had remarked, at the time of her brother’s unsatisfactory marriage with Maria Pennington, that they should have been far less surprised had Mr. Woolston waited till the younger sister grew up ; for that Bessy was the prettiest little creature in the world.

What she had since become, Mrs. Molyneux had as little troubled herself to inquire,

as whether the celebrated cattle for which annual prizes were decreed to Denny Cross were of the Devon or Durham breed.—And to whom could she now address herself for information?—To Molyneux Castle, she must not betray her anxiety. With her brother-in-law Harpsden, since the death of poor Carry, she had entertained no correspondence; and from the moment of her marriage, Gerald had discouraged all intimacy with missish country neighbours. It was therefore difficult to ascertain to what extent the prospects of her son might be endangered by Lord Wilchester's barn-yard propensities.

“ So true, what Gerald remarked at the time of my brother's wretched match,” mused Mrs. Molyneux, as she fixed her vacant gaze upon those bright blue waters of the Bay, which might have inspired less mundane reflections; “ so true that every downward step made by a family in such connections, entails others still lower, and lower, and lower.—There is always a descending

tendency. I remember thinking that though the match was certainly a poor one for John, my father and Gerald made too much fuss about its disadvantages.—But men are the best judges of such matters. Their knowledge of the world gets brightened up at their clubs, by the give and take of perpetual discussion ; just as the Americans become so much readier in business and prompter in talk, through the habit of frequenting taverns and boarding-houses, than the shy English, brought up on the silent system. But all this does not help me to a knowledge of the truth. And alas ! how much of our brilliant position in society do we not owe to the general persuasion, that Wilchester will never marry, and that Edgar is sure of the Dinton title and estates !”

Had not the delights of the Carnival been just then at their zenith, and the minds of the two selfish triflers whirled into giddiness and forgetfulness in the vortex of pleasure, their alarms might, perhaps, have prompted them to attempt,

in the family correspondence, one of those delicate investigations, so apt to produce the mischiefs they deprecate.—But they were too full of themselves to speculate very eagerly for Edgar ; and as Lady Jemima's next letter contained no domestic news more interesting than the fall from a ladder of a mason who was repairing one of the chimnies of the castle, without further allusion to “ dear Willy ” than that he had given a ten-pound note to the family of the sufferer, there was reason to hope that the tardily incubated Cupids of the future head of the House, had been addled ere they broke the shell.

Could Gerald Molyneux have surmised the true state of the case, his amazement would probably have exceeded even his disgust. That the daughter of a squire without a lodge to his paddock, or enough dictionary proficiency to regulate the amount of his ps and qs, should have presumed to decline the hand of a brother of *his*, would have indeed astonished him. Leaving

out of the question that the heir-apparent of the Earldom of Dinton, and its noble estates, was a man of tolerable appearance, good understanding, excellent temper, and unblemished reputation, he would have felt that a Bessy Pennington ought to have learned from the Wraysburys the respect due to so near a relative of one of the constituted authorities of the Upper Two Thousand represented in his own person.

But of the singular *denouement* of this short but very sweet acquaintance, nothing had transpired. The very affinities of character which had drawn them together, forbade them to seek counsel or confide to idle ears the strength or weakness of their hearts.—Though Lord Winchester's intimacy with the squire's daughter had arisen during her sister's sojourn at Denny Cross, and under the very eyes of Lady Wraysbury, his visits had been carefully accounted for, by messages brought from Lady Jemima or Lady Mary ; and poor Maria was much too happily occupied in wading through the snow with her

father, or taking bleak drives with him in a pony chaise without springs, to take much heed of the comings and goings of the deaf Viscount.

“Lady Dinton was so kind,—so very kind to send her the knitting-bag she had promised. But she was afraid it inconvenienced him very much to ride over about such a trifle. It might have been sent by the post, or the carrier; or been forwarded through the porter at Harrals.”

From the chaperonship of such a woman, even the inexperienced old bachelor felt that he had nothing to fear.—So he managed to call daily during the happy week enjoyed by Lady Wraysbury in the bosom of her family ; and on the day she left them, came naturally enough to dry the tears of Bessy. What more he said and did, need not be further insisted upon, than that his utmost efforts made no impression in his favour.—It was not that he was too old,—too plain,—too hurried in his courtship. Bessy

simply assured him, as she had assured others before him, that nothing would induce her to quit her father. Such was her duty—such her pleasure.

The gray-headed squire had numbered four-score years; and was beginning to be a little ailing in body, and more than a little failing in mind. She must stay and watch over him.—She had ever been his pet and darling,—his favoured, if not favourite, child.—Scarcely two years old when her mother died, she had been established on his knee upon the day of the funeral, to afford him such consolation as could be derived from the face that was likest to his dead wife's. And it was therefore he had always loved her better than Sophy or Maria.

Against such a statement, what was to be argued?—Lord Wilchester proposed that the old squire, with his rush-bottomed arm-chair, and India-rubber clogs, should remove with them to Havermead, his cheerful Bedfordshire home.

“ You cannot mean it ?” said Bessy ;—not

startled by views so liberal, but shocked that any one should fancy that another hearthstone, or another bed and pillow, could ever be to her father as those of Denny Cross ; where he first saw the light, and was prepared humbly and gratefully to close his eyes for ever.—His corner in the pew in church,—the place in the hall where he was accustomed to hang up his turnip-hoe,—the ledge in the study where his dog's-eared almanack was deposited,—the old crooked roller-blind he had so often mended,—the great oak table where his wife's coffin had rested before it was carried out to the grave,—all these familiar things, the *lares* and *penates* of poor old Denny Cross, were sacred,—were irreplaceable !—Lord Wilchester might have offered to inaugurate her, at once, under the roof of his parents, and it would have made no difference. The Castle would have been equally strange to the poor old squire.—The Castle would not have been home.—

At length, though something loth, he modi-

fied his offer into a proposal to reside with them at Denny Cross.

“And my brother Hugh?” — was the smiling reply; “whose dominion is absolute over the place, now that his father’s intellect is beginning to waver; and who would not like his hours and habits to be interfered with by a stranger. Even Mr. Farmer’s visit of a fortnight proved irksome to him; and though Maria fretted sadly at being away from her husband, she was glad, when she saw how little her brother liked to be thwarted, that Sir John had allowed her to come alone.”

In short, do what the devoted Viscount would, or sacrifice what he might, Bessy was inexorable. Her place was appointed unto her. Her duties were appointed unto her. And neither might be changed. But while she steadily explained her views with none of the faltering of a startled girl, but with the gentleness of a woman firm in her consciousness of right, she looked so pretty, so mild, so feminine,

—so charming a dimple hovered, every now and then, like a passing shadow, over her short upper lip, and so gracefully did her figure in its plain-made gown of dark merino hang over her work while she sat talking, that Lord Wilchester bent earnestly towards her to catch her faintest whispers ; and having heard and promised to submit, resolved to wait patiently for the death of that fortunate old squire, even if he lived to be a centenarian.

He went his way, a rejected man ; not a humiliated. Bessy had sued for the secrecy respecting their explanation which she voluntarily undertook to observe. It was unnecessary to inform him,—it might have created false hopes,—that she was afraid of exposing herself to the solicitations in his favour of her brothers and sisters ;—not because she mistrusted her own stability of purpose ;—but because she dreaded the contentions of a family-congress.

Such was the woman to whom—on the return of his wife to her family, little suspecting

what was occurring in the homely parlour she left behind—Sir John Wraysbury saw fit to refuse the company of Netta, for the week's holiday anxiously petitioned for by Bessy

“The little girl was getting too old for Denny Cross,” he observed. “At her present age vulgar ideas and habits were more easily contracted than got rid of.”

Though deeply hurt, Lady Wraysbury ventured to persist in her request. Her old father had made such a point of seeing once more his first and only grandchild,—named too, at his request, after his wife!—

“If Sir John were afraid of Janetta having too much liberty, and being allowed to romp as she used when a child, Miss Avesford would accompany her.”

“Miss Avesford?—Worse and worse!—what would Miss Avesford think and report of the habits of Denny Cross;—her brother keeping up a conversation all dinner-time with the half-doting old man-servant, and of the pudding

served with the meat?—Impossible,—quite impossible!”—

Maria was too self-governed to reply that, only a few years before, these things had passed unnoticed by himself; and that if Miss Avesford noted them with disrespect, she was no fit governess for Janetta; for never, in the course of her married life, had she irritated him by a bitter rejoinder.—She merely observed, after a pause, in a somewhat tremulous voice,—

“ You would do me a great favour, Sir John,—a great *kindness*, my dear John,—by allowing, for this once, the child to go. If not, my father will be sadly disappointed; and it is perhaps the last year he may be alive to make the request.”

But her dear John replied only by a significant negative gesture; and quitted the room, to evade further expostulation. Having made up his mind as doggedly as on that memorable July afternoon in the old eating-room at Harrals, he went his way, to squabble with bricklayers,

and tyrannise over carvers and gilders ; wondering within himself, whether Lady Wraysbury would ever be made to enter into her new position in life, or understand the importance of every new step and association concerning a daughter destined to be the richest heiress in the kingdom.

Poor child !—Poor little Netta !—She half cried her eyes out, that afternoon, on learning that her dream was not to be realised of one more visit to dear grandpapa and dearest aunt Bessy.—To her, Denny Cross, and the rabbit-warren, were far finer things than Harrals or Lynchcombe.

Poor child !—Poor little Netta !—Those tears were but as a summer shower compared with the tempests likely to beset her, or the hardships of an heiress.—Sir John could have already told her,—for he had made the calculation,—how many hundreds of golden sovereigns per day, or how many thousands per year, would eventually fall to her disposal.—But to

have calculated how many anxious hours, and hopes defeated, would probably embitter this overweening affluence, was as little in his nature as to conceive that there was as much vulgarity in his purse-proud fastidiousness, as in any custom, observed or omitted, by the simple inhabitants of Denny Cross.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER a separation of six long years, dear reader, we greet you well; trusting you will bear us no ill-will for sparing you the epoch of school-rooms and backboards, to which you may have been loathingly looking forward.—For though the shooting of the young idea is said to afford a delightful task to instructors, its uncertain growth, amidst weeds and nettles, is far from a pleasant subject of contemplation.

One point, indeed, of Janetta's progress towards womanhood, afforded a spectacle to which no one could object:—She grew up remarkably

pretty.—While Lynchcombe Hall advanced in majestic whiteness from basement to the crowning balustrade, little Netta became Miss Wraysbury, and a beauty.

A few envious neighbours, when they found that the merry boy still in the lower school at Eton had no claim upon the Dorsetshire property, were of opinion that her lovely countenance was a gift of supererogation that would better have become her younger sister, whose features were homely, and whose constitution frail.—But they saw her but rarely to make the comparison; for when, two years after her last visit to Denny Cross, Lady Wraysbury died in giving birth to a dead son, the Farmers, without progeny of their own, had, without much difficulty, obtained from Sir John the gift of little Constance. The shrewd eyes of old Roger having readily discovered that the little ailing girl, the only unportioned one of the family, was somewhat of an incumbrance to the widower, he proposed to adopt her as his own.

A man who, like Sir John, measured human beings, and sub-divided life and its business, exclusively by the letters L. S. D., (esteeming those who were catalogued under the letter D. at a three hundred-fold lower rate than those distinguished by the letter L.,) would, in fact, have been somewhat puzzled to estimate by the same rule and measure the future owner of millions, and the Cinderella fated to become her dependent : and it seemed better for all their sakes that Constance should grow up out of sight of the luxury in which she had neither part nor prospect.

And thus was poor Netta deprived of one of the surest aids to education : the companionship and sympathy of kindred blood.—She was fated indeed to be wholly alone in her glory. Her father, keenly alive to the dangers of propinquity between governesses and tutors,—those unhappy Parias naturally inclining towards each other,—had established the school-room of his son and daughter in different wings

of his colossal mansion ; and every body noticed that after the departure of little Nonny, Miss Wraysbury lost not only much of her cheerfulness, but much of her softness of deportment.

The gentleness of her mother, so long as she lived, had fostered the germ of tenderness in her heart ; and she yearned towards Denny Cross and her aunts, as the sunny memories of her childhood.—But after Lady Wraysbury's death, estranged from all intercourse with her mother's family, and reduced to formal interviews with her boy-brother, there was much danger that she might become as cold as her preceptress, and as calculating as her father.

For Miss Avesford was a person who unluckily knew everything, and felt nothing.—An orphan, trained from the time she could spell in a public institution for the education of education-mongers, she had been taught all that could be learned by books or rote ; but utterly estranged from that better schooling of the heart, sponta-

neously imbibed in the charitable atmosphere of a loving home. In moral deportment and superficial piety, no one could be better drilled: and few women were more qualified to prose down the most learned of learned Pundits in Crichtonian argument. But she was capable of greater wonders than this.—When undergoing, at half-yearly examinations, the cross-questioning of education-crazed Duchesses and Right Honourable Ladyships, she had obtained medals and premiums at their hands, without leading them to suppose she had discovered their own utter ignorance of all in which they affected to instruct her.

But learning so various, and even tact so nice, were not the endowments chiefly wanted in the education of a motherless girl. Though the conduct of Miss Avesford was unexceptionable,—so much so, indeed, that the model of propriety was secretly accused by Mrs. Dysart, the stately housekeeper at Lynchcombe, of aspiring to the hand as well as confidence of

the father of her pupil,—she had obtained no real influence over Janetta.

Nor was the clarifier of apricots and tyrant of spider-brushers justified in her dread of having Miss Avesford, or a Miss Anything else, set in authority over her. Sir John Wraysbury was the last man on earth to encumber himself again with a wife.—The careful administration of his fortune was too circumstantially pursued, to leave leisure for those yearnings after mutual affection, which lead the way to marriage. Nor would the birth of a new son afford a new heir to Lynchcombe. The Wraysbury property being bequeathed exclusively to the children of his marriage with Maria, the daughter of Richard Pennington, of Denny Cross, he might have as many male offspring as King Priam, and still Netta would remain his heiress.

Lynchcombe and Harrals therefore became the pets of Sir John ; as craving, alas ! in their nature, as the daughters of the horseleech. By degrees, he seemed to care more of his two

children as the future possessors of his two estates, than of the estates as the inheritance of his children. As to the professed governess, he looked upon her like a chaff-cutter or bone-mill on his farms ; a domestic machine, which received three hundred per annum to operate upon the raw material of his daughter's mind ; and which, after carding and weaving, and smoothing the raw material into fine broad-cloth, was to go and card, and weave, and smooth other wool of the first quality, elsewhere. He respected her, indeed, not only because she was sedate and unobtrusive, but because she had once consulted him about the investment of her savings ; and seemed to understand the mysteries of the Stock Exchange almost as clearly as those of syntax.

The secretive, or, as *he* called it, prudential nature of the man, rendered it meanwhile a matter of much comfort to Sir John Wraysbury, that, while the rent-rolls of the Dukes of Groby and Earls of Dinton were as familiar to the pub-

lic as the price of railway shares, the amount of *his* fortune, and the exact terms of his tenure, were known only to himself and his lawyers. “Enormously rich,” or “millionary,” were epithets generally applied to him. Reckless guessers declared that he had come into four or five millions, and enjoyed more than a hundred thousand a year. Envious neighbours persisted, on the contrary, that his income was enormously over-rated, and that the bulk of old Wraysbury’s fortune had devolved upon his nephews of the Liverpool firm; and many a prying investigator hinted that he was coining dollars from his American speculations; and that his dock property alone advanced every year in steady progression at the rate of five thousand per annum.

Though the world naturally concluded that, as in the ordinary course of things, this wondrous wealth was to descend to the son and heir of Sir John, a few persisted in asserting that Miss Wraysbury was the heiress. Even those who took the middle course, and fancied that it was

to be shared between them, decided that the demure little girl at Lynchcombé was to have a million or two for her portion. It was only a very spiteful family, residing as near to the Wraysburys as the sweeping nature of their property would allow, who declared that Miss Wraysbury was wholly dependent on her father; who, having married a person of low extraction, without settlements, could cut off his daughter with a shilling if she disengaged him by an unsuitable choice.

It was by these *frondeurs*, the Grandisons of Blandhurst, that the governess antipathies and prohibitions of Miss Avesford were chiefly drawn forth; and Sir John himself cherished against them the sentiments usually created between near country neighbours by the feuds of bailiffs and game-keepers, and the tale-bearing of the parsonage.

The Grandisons had, however, more pretext for their enmity to Lynchcombe than could be pleaded by Sir John. For the last half century,

their house had been the great house of the neighbourhood. Thanks to the decay and absenteeism of the Latimers, Blandhurst had risen in importance, till, on the marriage and establishment of the present Mr. and Mrs. Grandison, the handsome fortune of the bride enabled them to compete with the first households in the county.—A well-furnished house, well-distributed grounds, and a well-stocked manor, afforded them the pleasantest elements of country life. Even when the up-growing of several children created inroads upon their income, they made a considerable show in the hospitalities of the neighbourhood. Mr. Grandison of Blandhurst's year of high shrievalty was still a memorable epoch in the chronicle of county splendours.

But this was when the poor old house at Lynchcombe was perishing of a rapid decline:—no smoke rising from its chimnies,—no chariots or horsemen issuing from its gates:—when it was a dead letter,—a blank,—a blemish to the neighbourhood.—And when the new mansion

began to expand its wings, like a butterfly bursting from its chrysalis, and the glass domes of new conservatories, and arcades of aviaries were seen glistening among the ancient cedars, the Grandisons grew angry at the interest and curiosity excited around them by people whom, because their fortune came from Liverpool and their family stock from a distant county, they chose to regard as *parvenus*.

They disliked the new-comers all the more when this imputation was disproved, and the Wraysburys were inaugurated into their rightful position among the county thrones and dominions.—The untimely death of Lady Wraysbury, a few months after the establishment of the family in their new abode, created, indeed, the strongest interest in favour of her husband and children; and for some time, Blandhurst did not venture to raise its voice in disparagement.—But no sooner was the achievement removed from the house, and its doors opened, than they began to point out in a whisper the bad taste displayed in this

wonderful new and illustrated edition of “ poor old Lynchcombe.” They were the first to stigmatise it by the name of Aladdin’s Palace.

Taste is a thing at once so arbitrary and so shifting, and has unluckily become of late years so prevailing an epidemic, that to endeavour to set up a standard or enact laws for its better regulation, is like attempting to make ropes of sand, or daguerreotype the sky.—But every one but Mrs. Grandison and her fastidious daughters applauded that beautiful Elisabethan house, with its richly-carved furniture, damask hangings and costly cabinets ; its groined ceilings and inlaid floors ;—even apart from the commanding beauty of its site, and the recent thinning out of the adjoining plantations, to admit enlivening glimmerings of the sea.— Adam Wraysbury’s pictures and statues appeared to advantage in its well-proportioned gallery ; and except by those to whom the gloss of novelty is an offence, and who would probably have found fault with the Garden of Eden because the trunks

of the trees were not mossy or the avenues sufficiently venerable, the new seat was pronounced to be an ornament to the county, and one of the most charming residences in the kingdom.

In describing the family at Blandhurst, as “the Grandisons,” an especial exception should have been made of the head of the house; who was understood in the neighbourhood to entertain a very small share in the sayings and doings of his home circle. Having formed an early marriage at the instigation of worldly-minded parents, who considered the wealth of his bride a certificate of universal merit, he had soon discovered that her smiling face was a mask; that her understanding was narrow, and her power of mischief extensive.—But Mr. Grandison was too much of a philosopher to resent against her the faults previously overlooked, or to punish himself by a life of fretfulness for a youthful blunder. He made no complaints,—he displayed no disgusts; but withdrew, as far as the decorum of life would admit,

from her society ; affording himself perpetual occupation by improving his estate ; and taking refuge in his library and workshop,—his business as a magistrate, and pastime as a sportsman.—There was no occasion because he was yoked with an infirm temper, to ruffle his own.

He had consequently passed through life cheerfully and creditably ; instead of worrying himself, and diverting the public with scenes of conjugal disunion.

As his daughters grew up, indeed, it gave him some pain to see them imbibe pernicious lessons, and frustrate the better purposes of their nature. But he had the consolation of possessing a couple of sons ; who, like most boys formed in the atmosphere of public schools and universities, derived little of their colouring from the family prism.

If they allowed themselves to laugh a little at Lynchcombe and its pomposities, it was not because they considered their own dear Blandhurst,

with its pleasant woods and waters, eclipsed by so much grandeur ; but because they regarded Sir John Wraysbury as an Attorney-General *manqué* ;—a man to whom business was a pleasure,—and pleasure, business ;—who could neither sit his own thorough-bred horse, nor bring down his pheasants ;—and who looked as if the numeration and multiplication tables were perpetually seething in his brain.

But James and Albert Grandison were seldom at home : one, being in the Guards, and a Londoner ; the other, an *attaché* at one of the great southern courts.—Yet they alone were the cause of the distance maintained towards the family by the fore-sighted Sir John ; who was of opinion that two good-looking youngsters, such near neighbours, might prove dangerous acquaintances, hereafter, for the heiress of Lynchcombe. Aware how often it was his ill-fortune to stumble against the Miss Grandisons, on foot, in pony chaise, or on pony back, whenever he strolled about his domain on a tour of

inspection, he judged it more than likely that, with more enterprising riders, drivers, and walkers, the opportunities would be doubled. Meetings, on those breezy downs, where the sea air imparted such brilliancy to the complexion, and developed so many charms of symmetry and grace, were not without danger.

Not in his own case.—Never had Mrs. Grandison shot wider of the mark,—and her bow was a long one,—than when she asserted that Sir John Wraysbury lived in such terror of the designs upon his hand of his fair neighbours, that when he discerned them from half a mile's distance on the edge of the downs, he instantly put his fat shooting pony to best pace, in a contrary direction. Sir John had far too much confidence in himself for any alarm of the kind; and, never having been at any period of his chequered life a London man, he had heard little of manœuvring mothers or scheming daughters. His native county was a simple-minded shire. His own courtship was spontaneous; and his sisters

had married in the most straight-forward manner in the world.

Had the case been even suggested to him, the practical man would probably have regarded it with the eye of an actuary; and taking out his pencil and tablets, have calculated to a fraction his own value in the money market, as a mere tenant for life. But he *did* foresee danger for his daughter in the shape of two lively young men of fashion,—endowed with good teeth, extensive whiskers, and indomitable assurance.

But for the young Grandisons, Sir John would probably have found pleasure in the society of their father;—a man of his own years; who, though said by his family to shun society, because he retreated into his own den from the flashy groups with which it was their pleasure to invade his house, was anything but unsociable in more congenial company. The sarcastic comments occasionally extorted from him by the worldly ways of his family, as poison-

drops may be expressed from a wholesome plant, were never heard save in their presence; and in times of family tumult, he took sanctuary in his quiet library, as persecuted victims of old in some privileged abbey.

Unwilling, however, to embitter the lives of his wife and daughters by depriving them altogether of the atmosphere in which their flimsy wings seemed created to expand, he allowed them six weeks of London every season; on condition that their stay was never protracted beyond the commencement of the yachting season, when, though guiltless of the marine fopperies and *filoselle* bunting of Cowes, he heartily enjoyed a sail in his little cutter, which, at its moorings in Blandhurst Cove, formed a characteristic feature in the beautiful sea-view commanded by his library windows.

But unluckily this short sojourn in the metropolis served chiefly to revive the flightiness of the girls, and pretensions of their mother; enabling them to defeat Mr. Grandi-

son's views by rendering their country-house, for the remaining forty-six weeks of the year, as mean an imitation of London life, as a view of St. Peter's on a mosaic breast-pin.

Not a foolish fashion, not a paltry toy or silly book in vogue, but was carefully transferred to Blandhurst.—But these were of minor moment ;—ephemeral follies, that died with their day of popularity.—The real evil consisted in the society they managed to attract around them : people, whom they considered eminent, simply because they were notorious ; popular poets, with laurel crowns of foil and tinsel ; natural philosophers, originators of some scientific gimerack ; a prima donna secretly married (in presence of the universe) to some Hungarian magnate ; or a primo tenore the son of a Spanish grandee, and wearing the Golden Fleece in his waistcoat pocket. Above all, the author of the last political squib, naturally a candidate for the next vacant under-secretaryship of state ; or a beardless political

economist, prepared to prove by figures unimpeachable as those of a Blue-book, or Sir John Wraysbury's banker's account,—that by an interchange of commodities, the population of united Christendom might be kept, fat and well-loving, at a daily average of the fifth part of a maravedi per head. To crown all, an artist or two,—Lawrences and Wilkies in embryo,—to preside over the picturesqueness of the grouping, and enshrine the whole party in album immortality,—*i. e.* the Anno Domini ensuing.

Such a coterie, though out of date in London, where lion-feeding went out with old Lady Cork, and had its requiem said or sung in the sketches of Boz and Albert Smith,—had not lost its attraction in the provinces. The chorus-singer of the metropolitan opera, becomes the star of a country town; and the class of people who, in restless pursuit of novelty, pay a double subscription to circulating libraries for the pleasure of cutting every new book,—who cannot enjoy the annual exhibitions, except

on private days, and who crowd to the first representation of a play or opera, at the risk of their ribs and carriage panels,—find infinite satisfaction in beholding face to face those who are better met across the foot-lamps, or on a title-page: too eager to parade at second-hand the crumbs of information picked up from some Arctic discoverer, Swedish professor, or American Medium, to ascertain whether these itinerant workers of miracles be true prophets, or Jack-Puddings in disguise.

To Sir John Wraysbury, whose ideas of geographical discovery scarcely overstepped Cook's voyages, and who still believed in the Satire of the Anti-Jacobin and the sculpture of Nollekens, these fashionable impostors heralded by the *Mirliton* or penny-trumpet which is the clarion of drawing-room fame,—were simply bad characters to be avoided:—people not to be trusted with your name, lest they should use and abuse it, in endorsing either a bill or some mischievous tenet.

That not one of Mrs. Grandison's black swans, or calves with six legs, should ever set foot in Lynchcombe Hall, he was steadfastly resolved. And as its façade, rising above the woods, afforded one of the finest objects in the neighbourhood, and as it was known to contain many admirable works of art, it was no small mortification to the vain-glorious lady to be obliged to own, in answer to the hints of her guests, especially such as pretended to be artists, that the enchanted castle was unapproachable.

“Sir John Wraysbury considered his daughter, being motherless, as too young to receive visitors ; and upon principle, set his face against making a show-house of his family mansion.”

“If he possessed a treasury of art such as that of Lord Westminster, Lord Ellesmere, the Duke of Bedford, and many others of the aristocracy,” added Mrs. Grandison, by way of apology, “he would, of course, be obliged to pay the customary tax for such a distinction. But as his collection consists of a few cast

and copies, and the chief attraction to his house is a daughter who will some day be rich enough to pay off the national debt, he is quite right to put iron bars to his doors and windows.—We all know that the custody of the crown jewels is a sinecure, compared with the guardianship of an heiress.”

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